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THE SILENCES OF JESUS  
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ST. PAUL'S HYMN TO LOVE

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THE SILENCES OF JESUS  
AND  
ST. PAUL'S HYMN TO LOVE

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# THE SILENCES OF JESUS



I  
THE SILENT YEARS



# I

## THE SILENT YEARS

THE first thirty years in the life of Jesus are miscalled silent years, if the phrase suggests to us a picture of the Man of Nazareth passing among His kinsfolk and neighbours and fellows in dreamy self-absorption, unresponsive, persistently reticent. The Nazareth years, surely, were not silent on this wise. Hidden away in those years there is the voice of a little Child, the broken music of imperfection. There are all the utterances of the most wistful boyhood this world has ever known. There is a golden thread of converse running through the house of Joseph, the carpenter's shop, the village street, and through gatherings of the few or the many, as the life of that little town throbbed on.

But those years, not silent in themselves,



are silent for us. They hold in their keeping much with which the world could not be trusted. The veil that the historian has drawn over the childhood of Jesus is woven not of ignorance but of reverence. It is abundantly clear that the extreme slenderness of the record is intentional. ‘*Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.*’ She could have written a very full story of the Christ-Child. Every mother is a silent historian. Very likely St. Luke knew more than he recorded, and certainly Mary knew far more than she disclosed. The story in St. Luke’s Gospel, slight as it is, is beautiful; but, oh, the story in Mary’s heart—the story she might not tell! Yet surely it is well that the tale of the earliest years of Jesus is hidden for ever from the gaze of an inquiring world, safe folded in the heart of one whose perfect simplicity and faith and purity and reverence have never been surpassed in the fair story of good and holy womanhood. One shudders to think what the sceptic and the scoffer might have done with the story, had it been theirs to mishandle.

Once the silence is broken for us. The incident of the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple sheds a ray of light upon the mysterious problem of the development of the divine consciousness of Jesus: 'How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' Already there was a divergence of paths. Already He was where His parents could neither understand nor follow Him. Already the will of His Father was supreme in His life. But after that incident a deeper silence shrouds the life of Jesus. He passed back with Mary to Nazareth, and eighteen years were lived out ere the day came when He put down the tools for the last time in that little village workshop, and went forth to the baptism of John in Jordan, to three years of suffering and of service, and to those dread hours in the Garden and on the Cross that gathered up into themselves the perfect meaning of love, and all the forces that spell the redemption of humanity and the re-fashioning of the world.

These we might call the unrecorded years

of Jesus—but there are no unrecorded years. The pen of the historian may lie idle, but for all that history is written. It is graven in character. Every man has a sleepless and unimpeachable recorder within. From first to last nothing is missed, overlooked, forgotten, condoned. And at the end a man's character stands the abiding product of all his deeds and all his days. The thirty years in the life of Jesus of which we know so little are recorded in the three years of which we know so much. Do we not make a mistake when we speak of the three years' ministry of Jesus? The phrase is useful, but it may mislead us. It may lead us to forget the thirty years of life that went before and that were an essential part of that ministry. Jesus served God and man by a long ministry of silence. Think of it! Ten years of silence for one of speech; ten years of learning for one of teaching; ten years of preparation for one of service—as we reckon service. For thirty years hardly a whisper concerning Jesus crossed the rim of the Nazareth hills to be heard in the wider world beyond.

What was He doing all that time? He was learning to live. That silence is the greatest comment ever made upon the depth and height and difficulty of human life. In our anxiety to live we sometimes have contempt of life. We are impatient with what seems to us, perhaps, a tedious preface, a vague, uninteresting prologue. But the book of life has no preface. Every page is a page of the real story, and it has some essential line in it, if only we can find it. Some men fail, not because they are lazy or indifferent, but because they are more eager to do something than to learn what they ought to do and how they ought to do it. We scorn the simple, patient secret of efficiency. We fail to-day for lack of all that we despised yesterday. We make war upon obscurity, upon the limitations of circumstance, upon lowliness of position. The silent years of Jesus do not bid us accept these things. He never accepted them. For Him they did not exist. The word for those who fret their lives away in impotent denunciations of obscurity is not: Be content to live where you are, little and unknown. It is

rather this : ' Learn that, in the world of abiding realities, obscurity is a fiction of the worldly-minded, the shadow of self-ignorance, a misinterpretation of life. Wherever you are, the light of the all-beholding God is falling upon you, and the deep reverences and the high hopes and the eternal meanings of life are all about you. Jesus never really turned His back upon Nazareth. His life there was not a drab monotony, swept at last out of His mind by the vaster interests of those three crowded years in the eye of the world. Life for Him had always been growing greater and more wonderful. He passed out into that which some would choose to call the greater and wider world, and spake with wisdom and authority, because for Him it was no greater and wider a world than He had known at Nazareth. ' Vision and faith and obedience and prayer are the spacious things. Few of us can choose our position in life, but all of us can choose our communion.

And so, when we think upon the thirty silent years of Jesus, and the three in which

He taught and toiled, made His high claims and wrought His wonderful works, we may well feel ourselves at once rebuked and instructed. There is a word for the impatient, spasmodic, futile souls, eager to teach that which they have not learned, to explain that which they do not understand, to advance the good, and to right the wrong they have never really seen : and a word, too, for all who, amid the dust and noise and glitter of a busy world, have lost or failed to find the few simple, ever-present, eternal meanings of life that arise from, and meet in, the perfect will of God for every human soul.

Through the silent years Jesus made full proof of His *humanity*. The very silence of them tells us how simple and complete was His acceptance of the common lot. We can but believe, since there is not anywhere a suggestion to the contrary, that among the Nazareth folk He was simply Jesus the Carpenter. It was left for the world in after years, and through the centuries, to look into Joseph's workshop, and see the toil of Divinity revealing the divinity of toil. Jesus took His

place and part in the life of Nazareth—which in its essentials was then, and is now, the life of the world—so perfectly accepting its limitations, its hardships, and its necessities, that Nazareth accepted Him as a sharer in all its experience. \ He was above His fellows, but never aloof; beyond them, but never remote; unlike them in a thousand ways, yet in nowise among them as one strange and singular. Had things been otherwise Nazareth would never have kept the secret. Nazareth was silent concerning the great One who had stooped to share its lowly life, because it knew not that He was great or that He had stooped. We have no lack of witness to the true humanity of our Lord. But when we have followed through three strenuous and recorded years the footsteps of the Son of Man, there is still one testimony to be reckoned with. It is the silence of the veiled years. It is the verdict of Nazareth.

The *teaching* of Jesus draws the veils from off the hidden years at Nazareth. Those silent years determined the form of His message. When we listen to Him we re-



cognize the speech of One in perfect sympathy with human needs. He knew the difficulties of the toil for bread, how poverty has to fight for self-respect, and how the demands of daily labour militate against the wider view and the sweeter hope. He dwelt among a people who for the most part had no ideals, no education, few sensibilities, and many shames. Nazareth was a notoriously wicked place. Jesus learned how simple things have to be made for labouring folk, how impassable are the barriers of ignorance and prejudice to all but love. Hearts do not vary as minds do. Where the few can reason the many can love. Where one can follow an argument a thousand can follow a leader. All this was read at Nazareth. Through the limpid simplicity of many of Christ's utterances one can read the history of His hidden years.

And, pondering those years, we may each find some message for our own heart. We may learn to keep silence that we may have something to say. We may better appraise the probationary hours or years of life. We may become fully assured that there is no

good and needful thing from which the toil for bread ought to be able to shut us out ; and that the shame of toil is not that it hardens men's hands, but that so often it hardens their hearts. And following Jesus out into the years of gracious words and wondrous deeds, we may know that our little Nazareth lives, shadowed by obscurity and hedged about with limitations, are for ever lifted into a divine fellowship and lighted with a heavenly meaning.

II  
THE SILENT HOURS



## II

### THE SILENT HOURS

THE Gospels set forth the ministry of Jesus in a number of simple and often vivid pictures. Sometimes there are many figures in the scene. Those are the scenes that both the sacred writers and ourselves are best able to understand. Jesus was always most comprehensible when He was with the multitude. A company of folk is generally simpler in its moods, its needs, its claims, and its responses than is any one of all who help to form it. Sometimes there is only one other beside the Christ in the picture that is drawn for us. Witness that starlit hour when a ruler of the Jews struggled with the mystery of the new life; or that strange meeting at a well-side, when a woman with a frayed and passion-stained past looked

into the eyes of One who read the sadness and the shame of all her years. These pictures are more difficult to understand and to interpret. There is a depth of meaning in them that we cannot fathom. The interviews are deeper than the discourses. It was to one earnest and cultured Jew that Jesus revealed the mystery of the second birth, and to one Samaritan woman He spake of the living water and the wider worship.

And we cannot imagine it otherwise. Not only does reverence bid us grant instantly that the greatest Teacher knew how to teach, but our thought and instinct combine to make us feel that only in the more quiet and close and intimate intercourse of Jesus with the souls of men could the deepest mysteries of His teaching be expected to emerge. But now and again we come across a picture drawn with the finest possible strokes, drawn as one might draw who was permitted to use his pencil in some sacred spot, in the dim light of an inner room, or the shadow of an altar. And the picture thus drawn gives us a glimpse of a solitary Figure, battling with

awful powers in the wilderness, or communing with the Unseen on a silent hillside in the purple night or the stainless dawn. It is the Christ alone. And here we understand Him least of all. As the voices and the figures grow fainter and fewer the mystery of Jesus deepens for us, and when we find Him by Himself He is beyond us altogether.

The profoundest hours of life for any man are his silent hours. With the many he may be grave or gay, but he cannot realize himself with any fullness ; with the few, and most of all with just one other, the meaning and message of life grow deeper ; but it is left to solitude and silence to sound the deepest notes of his nature and chronicle the most profound experience of his soul. We can therefore easily understand how it comes to pass that the evangelists pause on the verge of Christ's silences. We must pause there, too. We cannot go farther than they, nor would we try to do so. But if in silence life finds its farthest meaning and most inward fulfilment, we can but wait here on the verge of these silent hours in the life of



Jesus, if maybe some gain of good may be ours.

When we think of the long years at Nazareth, years in which Jesus asked so little of the world about Him and so much of the world within and above Him — those listening, worshipping, life-deepening years ; and most of all when we feel how that the silence of vision, communion, and self-restraint was woven into them, we are not surprised to find in the after-ministry of Jesus traces of many silent hours. It seems natural to think that He who had known so long the shelter of the Nazareth hills should, amid the thronged and weary days of service that followed, have need to renew that experience. But the significance of Christ's lonely hours was not reminiscent. He never needed the refuge of fair memory. He never needed to reconstruct one perfect day, since all His days were perfect. His loneliness was never an escape from life. We must go farther than this if we would follow Jesus, even one short step, into those hours when the busy world and the little company of disciples saw Him not.

Jesus passed out to His life-work through the lonely silence of the Temptation. Every temptation, even if it flaunt itself in the thick of life, is a silent and a lonely thing. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness because that is just where we are all tempted. The picture of the tempted through all time is the picture of a solitary man. Every man must sometime find himself alone with the beasts and the angels. For us the dreadful silent hours are scattered here and there through life. We carry our temptations in our hearts, and when we say they spring upon us, we forget that it was our own heart that gave the signal to the ambushed ill. But with Jesus it seems inevitable that the dreadful hours should have come as they did, once for all and all together. His perfect and supreme character, His flawless spiritual nature, challenged the whole range of evil at once, and focalized the forces of evil in one incredibly intense struggle, whereof the issue never for one moment lay in doubt. Whatever we may think about the inner life of Jesus, we cannot believe that the wilderness

experience ever repeated itself. No man needs to win the same battle twice over. We wound our temptations, He slew His. And He came forth from that wilderness experience having tasted life for every man. Nay, having drunk more deeply of its awful meaning than ever man had drunk before. He won in that silence the power 'to succour them that are tempted.'

### III

## THE SILENT HOURS—(*continued*)



### III

#### THE SILENT HOURS—(*continued*)

THERE were hours when Jesus withdrew Himself from the company of His followers. The disciples always said concerning these disappearances of Jesus that He had gone apart to pray. If we can make our thought of prayer high enough and deep enough, if we can release it from the limitations with which we are apt to hedge it about, it may be that that saying of the disciples is a sufficient comment on many of Christ's silent hours. Prayer, in the truest sense in which we can conceive it, is communion with God. It is not utterance, it is experience. It is an attitude rather than a plea. To open the heart to God, to let the sense of His presence and love fill the soul, to pass into the quiet places

of light and peace where unutterable divine conviction and serene assurance dwell—this is, perhaps, to climb the heights and realize the possibilities of prayer. Jesus did this. Had He not needed to do this He had not been our Brother. He had the pure, essential needs of humanity. He realized the relation of the creature to the Creator. As we study the retreats of Jesus we can see that in some instances they had a most evident relation to His ministry among men. Silent hours preceded the choosing of the twelve Apostles and followed the feeding of the multitude. Whereby we may know that Jesus realized His dependence upon God and lived by faith. And whereby we may learn where to make life's choices and lay its toils.

But we can read the divinity of Christ in His silent hours. Note the manner of His passing through the world. We cannot find that there was anything behind Him that He wished to alter, or before Him that He feared to meet. He lived without regret. He sowed no seed of shame. Nor did He once in all His life, either by word or deed,



suggest that in the presence of the Eternal Righteousness He had anything to fear. Where all men saw the stern portals of God's justice, He saw the fair gates of His Father's house.

And as He lived and spake, so He prayed. No shadow of fear or shame crossed His communion with heaven. No sense of sin embittered the silence. And in this thing Jesus is not our human Brother, but our divine Saviour. For the best men the place of silence has ever been the place of shame and amendment. The silence of the saints is heavy with confession. Right through life's quiet hours, its leisure, its loneliness, its Sabbaths, its eventide, and the watches of the night when sleep comes not, there runs a line of judgement and of sorrow. It was not so with Jesus. For Him the silence held no shadow of shame, no whisper of reproach, no breath of contrition. He never knew one penitential moment. And surely it belongs not to human nature, even to ideal human nature, to have no note of shadowed strife in all its being.

In the second year of His ministry Jesus enjoyed, or rather we should say experienced, the favour of the people. His miracles and His message drew thousands to His side. There is no doubt that some responded to the deep spiritual claims of His teaching, and some were moved with admiration of His character and spirit, and with grateful regard for His wondrous powers, used ever for such clearly beneficent ends. But the interest that the majority of the people took in Jesus, and the kind of popularity He had among them, was, as subsequent events showed, worth very little. It was such as He did not seek and could not accept. And that period of Christ's ministry that saw Him so often in the heart of great crowds, that saw Him at times the hero of the people, saw not a few silent hours. Jesus hid Himself from the crowds that sang His praises and discussed His doings. There came a day when Jesus saw *that they would come and take Him by force to make Him a King*, and the evening of that day found Him *on a mountain alone*. Jesus knew that the scales

of judgement swing free and true in the place of silence. There alone can a man make the true analysis of life. On some quiet hillside Jesus weighed the enthusiasm and measured the loyalty of those clamorous crowds whose dust and murmur had been about Him all the day, and found them wanting. There He pierced to the very heart of what many men, and among them His own disciples, called success, and found it to be failure.

And in this thing He has left an example which men in all ages had done well to follow, and that was never needed more than we need it to-day. We are apt to clutch at kingship however it is offered to us. We accept the credentials of success without reading them. We take the crown of popularity, and in the brief glitter of it we do not notice that we have stepped down from the place of power to receive it. The sceptre of real authority and influence is part of the price we pay for the privilege of enthronement. And all this for want of one silent hour. It is not until we are beyond the voices of the

crowd that we can appraise truly all that those voices are saying. It is through the gates of silence that a man must pass to the just arbitrament of life. There we can value and test all that has been offered to us, or even thrust upon us, in the thick of things. And there we can see the shadow of ultimate failure lying across some brief promise of success, making it a vain and forbidding thing; and the light of ultimate success kindled in the very heart of seeming failure, making it a strengthening and hopeful experience.

Nowhere in the ministry of Jesus do silent hours play a larger part than in the story of what we have come to call Passion Week. The refrain of that story is found in the words, '*And when even was come He went out of the city.*' One day there was the entry into Jerusalem, amid the sound of many hosannas; another day the stern scene when Jesus drove forth from His Father's house the buyer and seller. Each day was full of the interruptions and new situations and manifold change whereof life in the city is compact. But with

the evening shadows Jesus went back to Bethany to commune, and that surely with a final and unspeakable intimacy, with the one availing purpose of His life so soon to be fulfilled. Surely at Bethany Jesus saw His cross as nowhere else, save just one place, and that a quiet garden. Not only on the dark day of His crucifixion, but evening after evening of that mysterious week, Jesus passed out of the city unto the passion that is our peace.

And we, remote as our highest and deepest experience must ever be from those mysterious days and nights, have need to pass more often than we do pass beyond the city, with its ministry of confusion and belittlement, back to the greatness of life, back to the ideal, back to our very best. We must pass by the path of communion from the presence of the many who need us into the presence of the One whom we need. The silence that searches out for us the true meaning, be it fair or shameful, of every swift and crowded hour of life, does more than this. It links the hours together. It makes for unity and recon-

struction. It gives us a fuller vision of the ideal than any one can hope to see through the tangle of cross-purposes or the brief rifts in the clouds of anxious toil.

IV  
THE SILENCE OF LOVE





## IV

### THE SILENCE OF LOVE

*But He answered her not a word.*—MATT. XV. 23.

THE case of the Canaanitish woman with a sick daughter seemed just such a one as would have appealed instantly and completely to the Christ who went about doing good. Surely there was never an occasion in all His ministry that called more urgently and justifiably for the exercise of healing power. The picture of the incident is full of need and pleading. The woman had probably come far and fast. Tokens of much travel and weariness were upon her. The dust on her hair and her feet, the pallor of her face, told this much at least, that she had been ready to pay the price of an interview with Jesus. Maybe she had taken that journey from

Phoenicia across the border into Galilee on the strength of a rumour. Perhaps she had but some chance word concerning Christ's reported presence in that region to decide her in her setting forth and to stay her by the way. She was not sure that she would find Him, or that He would help her if she did. And who does not know how uncertainty as to the exact goal of a journey, or the practical outcome of it, can double the weight and weariness of travel ?

Then, too, she had surmounted the stern, strong barrier of race. She shared some of the instincts of that people that closed their doors and steeled their hearts against a little band of travellers for no other reason than that their faces were turned towards Jerusalem. She knew how that a Jew was loth to ask and unlikely to receive a boon from a Gentile. But she, a Gentile, was ready to ask one, and that a great one, of a Jew. And all this not for herself, but for one dearer to her than her own life. The one clear motive for her journey and her plea was her mother-love, a pure, unselfish, self-justifying passion. And

surely as she stood before the Christ, a brave, anxious, troubled mother, she challenged the perfect pity and power of the great Healer. *'Have mercy upon me, O Lord, Thou Son of David ; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.'* That was a plea simple enough to answer.

So thought the disciples. Their request, *'Send her away,'* was not a mere plea for her dismissal. It implied the granting of her desire. They had seen the hand of healing stretched out, had heard the word of healing spoken, for less than this. In their minds there was no doubt whatever as to what Jesus would do. He would certainly heal this woman's daughter. There she stood, and her shrill, anxious crying troubled their ears. And they could see no reason why her case should not be dealt with on the instant. *'But He answered her not a word.'*

What was there in that silence Jesus so strangely kept? It was a sympathetic silence. Much as it may have perplexed this pleading woman, she probably never doubted that. There was no feature or fact in that

simple scene that Jesus did not see and value perfectly. However the situation appealed to the disciples, it appealed far more strongly to their Master. Their easy suggestion, 'Give her this thing she asks, and let her begone,' was a shallow response compared with the silence of Jesus. He responded to the woman's whole need. It was not the daughter's benefit only, but the mother's that He was pondering. It was not her concrete need, but her inward character, with which He was most intimately concerned. But whilst Jesus kept silence the woman did not lose hope. His silence did not silence her. That was surely because she could see His face. She found there something that helped her to abide the tarrying of His reply. Not enough, maybe, to tell her what that reply would be, but enough to keep her seeking it and pleading for it and waiting for it.

We do not know what God's answers will be, but we do know what His attitude is. The profoundest fact for us in our hour of prayer, as in every other hour of life, is this : God is love. And like the woman in Christ's

presence, we, in the presence of the Father whom Christ came to reveal, may know that our request, our plea, however long the answer be in coming, or whatever the form of it when it comes, has put us in touch with an infinite sympathy. God turns toward us in His silences. Whether or no He brings us nearer our desire, He brings us nearer His heart.

Jesus was on the verge of giving this woman from Phoenicia a visible and tangible proof of His love. She was to enter her cottage and be greeted by her daughter, no longer dishevelled and distraught, but once more a free and happy girl. But the love that she was to read so easily upon the smiling face of her child she had to read first with a searching, heart-trying gaze into the silent face of Jesus Himself. It is not in the face of life but in the face of Christ that we learn what love means. Is it too much to suggest that had Jesus not broken the silence with which He at first greeted this needy woman, and had the perfect wisdom of the Master sent her back without a word to go

on bearing that most bitter pain of life, the pain of seeing a loved one suffer—that when the sharp pang of disappointment had passed away the mother would have felt better able to bear her grief, if not to understand it, for having looked into the silent face of the Eternal Love?

*‘He answered her not a word.’* Some time or other that is the experience of every pleading life. The silence that follows some requests is not of moments but of years. But if you look into these things, you will find that some who have faced such silences are more at rest in the supreme and everlasting love of God than some whose hopes and desires have in the main found speedier fulfilment.

And there was something more than fathomless sympathy in the silence Jesus kept amid this woman’s anxious pleadings. There was the last and richest test of faith. Her heart had been prepared for that great hour of mercy and of help by all that had gone before. She had passed through the discipline of helpless and apparently hopeless

sorrow. She had learned how little earthly love and skill can sometimes do. She had been made ready for that whisper that reached her far-away village home, told her of the presence of the Son of David near the borders of her country. She had borne the test of a long and trying journey. Surely all this was enough. Surely she had made proof of her earnestness and of her faith. The disciples thought so. But the Master saw that here was a life that might go further yet, and rise higher and win a greater victory and a nobler blessing. It was because she had done so well that He counted her to have earned the right to do better still. Here was a soul with grand possibilities. Here was a heart full of unselfish love, full of fine persistence and splendid endurance. Here was the will to seize good, a capacity for faith that must not be wasted. The heart of Jesus went out to this brave mother from the moment she entered His presence. And He willed to give her, as was His wont with every suppliant, not simply the best she was able to ask, but the best she was able to



receive. So '*He answered her not a word.*' And the faith that had led her forth from her stricken home, and borne her on her hard, uncertain journey, and lifted her above her national prejudices, and brought her to the feet of Christ, won yet another victory greater than them all. Having found Jesus and told her story, she had done all. She had to wait. And she waited.

There is a faith we can weave into our toils. There is a hold of God we can get as we grasp a situation with all the courage and endurance of which we are capable. And this faith is a good thing. But it is not the best thing of which our souls are capable. It brings us to the throne of grace, but it cannot by itself and as it is keep us there. So when we have done all, suffered all, dared all, within the sphere of our powers and endeavours, God calls us onward and upward into the place of silence where faith without works, or shall we say beyond works, wins its last battle and finds its richest fulfilment.



V

THE SILENCE OF UNUTTERABLE  
THINGS



## V

### THE SILENCE OF UNUTTERABLE THINGS

*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*—JOHN xvi. 12.

THE question is sometimes raised why Jesus left so many things not finally and definitely cleared up. It seems to some people that it would have been a very simple thing for the omniscient Christ to have anticipated and foreclosed centuries of weary and clouded debate. Surely He might have given to the world a fuller message; or He might have interpreted the message He did give in terms so clear and rigid, and withal so detailed in their application to life, that the voice of argument and the clash of view would never have broken the quiet of the Christian Church. Such thoughts as these are very shortsighted. They betray ignorance

of the true nature of spiritual knowledge. They involve an utter misconception of the meaning and method of a divine revelation. They flout the precious mystery of the gospel. And they contain an implicit reflection upon the profundity and range of the truth for which Jesus stood and which He was. Jesus answered all who should ever be tempted to wish for a larger legacy of uttered truth and formulated teaching than He should leave to the world, when He said to His disciples, '*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*'

The first note that catches our ear in these words of Jesus is the note of sympathy. Some echo of these words rings faintly in our own lives. The wiser and the stronger we become, the more fully is the law of reticence laid on our hearts. The father has respect unto the tender years of his son. The man who has to sit for the moment upon the seat of judgement has regard for the distress or remorse or callousness of the wrongdoer. The man who goes forth upon a ministry of consolation has to bear

in mind the frailty of a bruised and bleeding heart. And surely in these things we may find some partial clue to the reticence of Jesus. But we must be careful to define the quality and meaning of the sympathy that reticence betokened, or we shall soon find ourselves in difficulties. Jesus did not forbear to say things that needed and waited to be said, simply because the saying of them would burden the minds and pain the hearts of His followers. The fear of giving pain has ever been one of the chief things whereby easy optimism, consciously one-sided expositions of life, and deliberate concealment of truth, wholesome to hear and hard to utter, have been wont to justify themselves. Jesus the perfect Teacher did not fear to say a painful thing. His whole ministry affords proof positive of this. Those who companied with Him knew many hours of the shadowed mind and the trembling heart. But Jesus distinguished between the pain that makes for enlightenment and the pain that makes for blindness. He had to reconstruct His disciples' ideas without

destroying their personal allegiance. He had to put no greater strain on their *minds* than their *hearts* could bear. The limit of possible instruction was the extent of actual devotion. The disciples were to a large extent earthly-minded in their conception of Jesus and His mission, even to the very end. It needed those awful, heart-deepening hours of the Passion-tide, the splendid mystery of the first Easter morning, the Ascension, and the great day of the Spirit, to bring them into a fitness to know that which they needed to know concerning Jesus.

All knowledge of Christian truth has a relation to experience, and most of all to the experience of love. There are mysteries of the faith that our minds fail to penetrate. There are the things that reason finds unfathomable, and logic finds bewildering. But, more often than we suspect it, our heart fails us in the quest for truth. There are standards of conduct we have not the courage to behold, splendours of law and judgement unto which only a greater love than we possess can lift up its eyes. Jesus drawing His disciples

nearer to His side, that they might thereby become able to go further into the awesome places of knowledge, reveals to us a law of revelation. God draws us nearer the heart of His love that we may be able to look with unconfused vision upon the dread and weighty wonders of His truth.

*‘I . . . but ye . . .’* That is ever the sad antithesis that explains the ignorance of human hearts concerning things divine. We say, ‘Why has not this or that been revealed unto us? Why in such and such a thing have we been left in darkness?’ The darkness is not above us, but within us. The reticence of Heaven is only the weakness and unworthiness of the human heart viewed, so to speak, from above. There is always a silence at the heart of speech. Sometimes it is the silence born of the speaker’s limited knowledge; sometimes, as in this case of Jesus and His disciples, it is the silence born of the hearers’ limited power of reception and response. Jesus kept back nothing that His disciples were able to receive. He could not speak because they could not hear. He

told them less than He knew, but as much as they were able to know.

His reticence was not arbitrary. It was perfectly congruous to the whole law and principle of revelation. The great problem of the prophet and the preacher has ever been the unprepared heart of the people. Willingness to listen is not always equivalent to ability to understand. And if the small distance that lies between the wisest and the most foolish man counts for so much, if we in our human experience know how even a slight advance beyond our fellows in knowledge or sensitiveness can seal our lips, or at any rate limit our utterance, how much more should the Eternal Word be folded about with a silence conditioned by the darkness of men's minds and the hardness of their hearts! Jesus could not have taught the world as much as He did teach it had He not chosen out of it just a few souls who by their history, nature, and affinities were comparatively teachable. And even these He could not teach just as He would. That which seemed complete to them was frag-



mentary to Him. They counted Him to have said all when there was yet all to say. He was always sounding their thoughts and hopes and sympathies. And, alas! many a thought of His He dared not launch because it would straightway have gone aground, and have been stranded and useless in the shallows of their lives.

Revelation is not mechanical, it is moral. One of the great ends of life is to make us able to know. Experience does not make us wise merely by the measure of the experience itself; it is meant so to affect our character that we may be put into touch with some further range of that divine truth that is ever waiting at the door of our hearts. Experience by itself cannot make us wise, but it can make us teachable.

And revelation is progressive. 'Ye cannot bear them *now*,' said Jesus of the things He wished to teach His disciples. They were able to receive them by and by. They became in time able to know. The knowledge of spiritual things is not in any man's life a matter distinct and separate from all else. It

is bound up with his reverence, courage, love, and faithfulness; and as these things grow in him, so does one and another of the 'many things' pass into his life's possession.

VI

THE ANSWER TO THE CURIOUS



## VI

### THE ANSWER TO THE CURIOUS

*Lord, are they few that be saved ?—LUKE xiii. 23.*

*Lord, and what shall this man do ?—JOHN xxi. 21.*

TO both of these questions Jesus made reply, and in each case there was at the heart of that reply a resolute silence. We have seen that there is a law of silence written in our limited power of reception, our inability to respond to the whole truth. We have seen how that Jesus sometimes kept silence because He had reached the limit, not of all He wished to say, but of all that His disciples were able to hear. But the silence we are now considering was not on this wise. It was not that Jesus could not, but that He would not, speak.

These two questions have a good deal in

common. They both represent attempts to penetrate the future in the interests of speculative curiosity. ‘*Lord, are they few that be saved?*’ We do not know who asked that question. That does not matter. Indeed, for the moment, the question itself does not matter very much. The important thing is the attitude of mind that the question reveals. It was just the kind of speculative and unprofitable inquiry that is so often stirring and whispering in our minds. Peter’s question concerning his fellow disciple John, ‘*Lord, and what shall this man do?*’ represented probably a spasm of curiosity rather than a persistent attitude. This impulsive man had just been trusted with a clearer vision of his own future than is commonly granted to men. And the first word he uttered after the granting of that vision revealed the peril of the trust. The spell of a broken secret was upon him, and for a moment there was no secret at which he was not ready to grasp. He saw one in the face of John. There is a secret in every face. He asked for it to be revealed to him. And

Jesus gave him no ray of light. And the silence of Jesus in the face of these questions is very significant. It was not, like the silence we last considered, a burden that the weakness and earthliness of those about Him compelled Him to carry; it was a right which the curiosity of those about Him compelled Him to defend.

There is a silence in life that is valuable to us because it is ever trembling into speech at the advent of the growing mind and the deepening heart. But there is a silence the worth of which lies in the fact that no man has ever been able to break it. For saint and sinner alike this silence holds its own. In some things God keeps His own far counsels in a way that gives us no encouragement to seek them out. The silence with which Jesus treated these two questions—one concerning the fate of the many, and the other concerning the future of an individual—suggests that in some wise each question involved an attempted trespass upon the sovereign silence of the Infinite Wisdom. Part of life's perfect spiritual obedience is

manifest in our attitude towards the unrevealed. The agnostic and the inquisitive minds travel by widely different routes, but not always in different directions. The man who, without respect unto the moral nature and vital uses of knowledge, is anxious to know everything, misses some things that he might know, as surely as does the man who is doubtful whether he can truly know anything. Jesus taught implicitly in His silence that the inquiring mind must have something more than a thirst for knowledge ; it must be guided and safeguarded by reverence, by practical faithfulness amid life's spiritual demands, and by an abiding respect unto the wise reticence of the Eternal. Before Jesus answers a man's questions He revises his catechism.

One of the greatest transgressors in life is Curiosity. True, it has ever been a pioneer of progress. Hand in hand with its gaunt and yet far stronger brother Necessity, it has opened up the treasures and resources of the world. We owe it a great debt. But in the world of religion it has no standing at



all. Many take it for their guide at times ; and it invariably misleads them. In these two questions put to Jesus we see how little curiosity can do for us. ‘ *Are they few that be saved ?* ’ That question has stirred in sincere and devout hearts. It has been found on the lips of those who have felt the almost intolerable slowness with which sometimes the kingdom seems to come, or have turned from the outlook of some hopeless hour in their service to search for a gleam of light in the face of Infinite Love and Power. But the fact that Jesus ignored it proves that it was not asked after this fashion. He would not have dismissed such a plea as shallow and irrelevant. Doubtless in this case the query was brought by one who felt none of the tragic possibilities of the inquiry. It was just a most subtle and debatable point on which it would be interesting to get this new Teacher’s opinion. And He would not give one. And if we search this silence of His we shall find it was critical and disapproving. In that Jesus did not answer this man’s question He implicitly condemned the asking of it. He

looked straight past the matter that had awakened his questioner's curiosity, and made him behold that which should awaken his moral sense. And that silent overlooking of the point raised was meant to rebuke the spirit that had raised it, to correct men's perspective, to readjust their interest, and to put first things first. Jesus never turned a deaf ear to a morally earnest plea for light and truth, and He never answered the casuist and the speculator, saving in such a way as might redeem their minds from casuistry and speculation to simpler and deeper things. To the merely curious, and to those who merit some worthier term, but whose interest in life is theoretical and philosophic, the gospel is silent. It does not answer their thought; it seeks to direct it into channels where an answer is not only possible but valuable.

This man, with his question about the number of the saved, and Peter with his question about the destiny of his fellow disciple, received no answer, not because they had invaded life's sacred mysteries,

but because they had not emerged from its secularities. The silence of Jesus implied not the greatness of their questions, but rather the littleness of them. There are some who decide that Jesus has nothing to tell them worth hearing, when of a truth they have asked Him nothing morally worth answering. Their vessel has not reached the water; and so they go away to inform their world that the well is dry.

‘*Strive to enter in. . . . Follow thou Me.*’ That was the note that Jesus struck in His rebuke to those two men whose questions He did not answer. He appealed for personal moral effort and for complete obedience. Not that these things would furnish some day the answer He withheld, but rather by these things a man might be delivered from the fruitless questings of a curious mind through listening to the profitable behests of a faithful heart.

Maybe no man is always sure that the quest of his mind is making for the thing he should most fitly be learning; but he may be sure of this, that out of all the silences of

life, the silence of ignorance, of limitation, of wonder, and of patience, there comes one challenge to the heart of him whose love is unto Christ. ‘*Strive to enter in. . . . Follow thou Me.*’

## VII

# JESUS BEFORE HIS ACCUSERS AND HIS JUDGES



## VII

### JESUS BEFORE HIS ACCUSERS AND HIS JUDGES

*As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.*—ISA. liii. 7.

NOWHERE is the silence of Jesus more impressive and significant than in the terrible passage of events between His arrest in Gethsemane and His being led forth to Calvary. Jesus knew how to suffer. He was infinitely able to endure. Through those hours, cross-woven with hate and spite and jealousy, enmeshed with the most sordid and ignoble and bitter passions of human life, Jesus passed, keeping His dignity unscathed. Nothing availed to smirch the whiteness of the robe of life He wore. Nothing obscured, even for a moment, one of the

things that went to make Him the most strong and gracious figure in all the world. Not once was He embroiled in the strife that went on all about Him. Not once do we lose sight of Him, alone and matchless, amid the rabble of imprecations, lies, and injustices.

And not least among the things that make this so was the silence Jesus kept. There is one thing that belongs to every hour of that silence, whether before the Sanhedrim or before Pilate or before Herod, and that is ineffable patience. It was more than simple endurance. It was more than complete acceptance of the inevitable. It was so strong and deliberate and self-determined. Jesus was the perfect captain of His soul. Had He not spoken a single word, had He refused to answer a single question, His silence had taught us, maybe, how much can be endured. But He did speak, and so His silence, when He chose to keep it, teaches us a great deal more. It reveals to us the quality and the place and the use of endurance amid life's most dreadful and bitter things. Jesus



was never stung into saying anything. He made no mere retaliation, no sharp retort. Nothing was wrung from Him. He spoke out of the quiet of infinite patience, out of the light of an unclouded counsel, out of the leisure of unhurried decision. He could not have spoken as He did had He not been able to keep the silence He did keep.

That silence speaks to us of more than mortal wisdom and love. It is the guerdon of a divinity we can only trust and worship. But it is also in some sense a guide to us for our own lives in a world where every man is called soon or late to live through some hour darkened for him by this world's unjust counsels and cruel purposes, and where never a day passes that brings not to our ears some murmur from the forsworn and impenitent hosts of sin. Our answers are so feeble because our silences are so unworthy and so few. Jesus did not condescend to reply to the perjured hirelings, nor to them that had hired them, concerning the lying charges; but He did not hesitate to speak the words, to make the admissions and the claims, that

sealed His doom. For us so often silence is a coward's shelter, and speech a cunning or a passionate self-defence. We need the love and courage and vision and steadfastness of purpose that can help us to make each silence and utterance of life not something from which we hope to gather a selfish gain, but rather something for which we are ready to pay the just price. We may at least learn from the silent Christ that there are falsehoods too false to be worth a denial, and charges too obviously vindictive and baseless to be worth refuting. There is a battle that is won with a sheathed sword. There is an argument of purity that words cannot strengthen. There is a debt of silence that in the name of his manhood, his spiritual dignity, and his pity, a man sometimes owes to his own soul.

When we come to search the silence Jesus kept before Pilate, we can find something that indicates Christ's attitude towards His judge. On that tragic morning when Jesus was brought to Pilate's praetorium, the governor had been busy trying the string of cases

waiting his judgement. Jesus was just one amongst the rest, and it is evident that Pilate meant to deal with Him according to the principles of Roman justice as he understood and administered them. He demanded the charge. At first he refused to let the Jews have what they asked for—a blind verdict of guilty. He went to the trouble of taking Jesus aside and privately interviewing Him, and then he went forth to the Jews and acquitted Him. ‘*I find no fault in Him.*’

The alarming outburst of passion with which this sound judgement was received made Pilate afraid to abide by it, and as a possible way out of the difficulty of deciding between the voice of his conscience and the clamour of the crowd he sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, who, failing to get any amusement out of the Captive, sent Him back to Pilate. And now a very significant thing happened. Jesus had been quite ready, in the former interview with Pilate, to answer such questions as helped His judge to come to a just decision. But on the second occasion Pilate, having caught the words ‘*He made Himself*

*the Son of God,*' took Jesus aside once more and asked Him, '*Whence art Thou?*' and Jesus would not answer him. Unwittingly Pilate was asking for an aspect of the case which would have tested him not merely as a just or unjust governor, but as a devout or irreligious man. By His silence Jesus kept the case that Pilate had to deal with well within the range of Pilate's power to do right. All that was required of Pilate that morning was that he should be as just as he knew how to be, that he should have the courage to do the thing he knew to be right. We may be inclined to pity Pilate, who knew, in a sense, nothing of the real situation, and was incapable of understanding it. But in Christ's tacit refusal to enlighten this man, to raise any other issue than that of simple justice, or to cloud with one word of bewildering enlightenment the clear view of duty that Pilate possessed, we can see that the Roman governor was submitted to no unfair or impossible test. Pilate failed not because he was lacking in theological insight, but because he lacked the courage to do his duty. Surely Jesus

saw the struggle in the mind of this man. Surely the heart of Christ compassionated this soul, tempted, and at last yielding to the temptation, to put his career before his conscience. This silence of Jesus testifies for all time to the perfect justice and mercy of God, who never leaves us at any moment in our moral life either groping in utter darkness or blinded with too much light.

The silence of Jesus before Herod was a very different thing. Apparently Jesus did not speak one word to Herod. It was no use saying anything to that flippant and remorseless debauchee. He did not want anything that Jesus could give to him. If ever Jesus was hopeless it was surely as He stood before that leering sensualist, that heartless tyrant, for whom life, and every good thing in it, had become something between a jest and a curse. Jesus could do nothing for Herod. But the trouble and tragedy of that hopeless meeting were felt not by Herod, but by Christ. Whether or no a man can kill his conscience, this much at least is certain, that no man

could do that and then wish that he had not done it, or bear one faint regret for the deed, for that wish and regret would prove that there was life in the smitten thing, and while there is life there is hope.

VIII  
THE SILENT COMING OF THE  
KINGDOM





## VIII

### THE SILENT COMING OF THE KINGDOM

*He shall not strive nor cry aloud ; neither shall any one hear His voice in the streets.*—MATT. xii. 19 (cf. ISA. xlii. 2).

*And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth.*—MARK iv. 26.

*The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.*—LUKE xvii. 20.

AS we read such words as these, we surely learn that the silences in the life of Jesus have a significance wider, and in some senses deeper, than that which we have so far found them to possess. We have seen how that the silence Jesus kept always met the central need of the situation that outwardly occasioned it. But each silence in the life of Jesus, from Nazareth to Calvary, has a meaning that goes far beyond the immediate circumstances to which it first had reference. If we turn from the incidental to the cumulative teaching of

the silent hours, we shall find that they link themselves to the inner meaning of the kingdom of God and the fashion of its coming among men. Jesus came to found this kingdom. Now, the founding of a kingdom has ever been accompanied with noise and force. All this world's dynasties have been born on the battlefield. The clash of weapons, and behind it the more dreadful clash of proud and selfish aims, has ever been the cradle-song of every power that has arisen. Not that mere might has ever been a really decisive thing in the world's history. Right and truth have ever had real dynastic power in the larger life of the world. But their light has had to break upon men through the smoke of the battle, and even men of steadfast moral purpose and of real spiritual aim have been wont to look upon outward force as having some necessary place in the vindication and establishment of religious truth. But the last kingdom, the kingdom of God, stands over against all this. Here it is not to be so. And it matters everything that we be quite sure of this. We treasure and study the

things Jesus said touching the kingdom. We take for our everlasting comfort and help those things He did on behalf of the kingdom, and most of all the last great work on the cross, wherein Christ's service of the world is completely gathered up and fulfilled. But we do not understand, and we cannot truly serve, the kingdom Jesus set forth in His teaching and established by His Cross, if we do not properly recognize and appreciate the element of silence in it. It is not to come as even the strongest and the worthiest earthly kingdoms have come.

Let us see what the Silence of the Kingdom really means. Perhaps it is better to miss it altogether than to misunderstand it, and therefore misuse it—this fact of silence. Some hail with joy any word concerning the silent coming of the Spiritual Kingdom. It saves them the strain of listening for it. It enables them to say, Lo, it may be here even now, though they have done nothing to prepare the way for it or to try to bring it in. It is so easy to misuse the mystery of the faith. So easy, too, to be merely vague, and to pass

unconvinced and uncommitted amid the positive claims and challenges of the eternal things. The indeterminate is a coward's refuge. It is the favourite shelter of the soul that fears to know and fears to do. The very occasion by which faith wins its victory becomes by base or weak use an excuse in which unfaith hides itself. Men may talk about the unseen, untraceable coming of the kingdom in such a way as shall enable them to weave bright hopes and wonderful possibilities into their most faithless and workless hours. Carried to its last extreme in this direction, this talk of the kingdom that cometh not with observation may lead to a gratuitous and supine satisfaction with an experience that lacks both joy and victory, and with a tale of fruitless years. God forbid that we should so construe the silence of the kingdom as to find in it something that lessens the urgency of our spiritual endeavour, that puts a premium on our incapability, that condones our most culpable failures and that veils our shame. Christianity is positive, active, evidential.

It cannot be reduced to mere tendency or tone, or, even spirit, in the vague and shallow outlook that that great word too often connotes. It has its messages, its marks, its continuous and palpable achievements. The kingdom of God comes by silent forces, but it is not itself a silent thing. If we overlook that we shall disparage results, and to do that is, in the long-run, to discount processes. To minimize the worth of achievement is to discredit the value of effort.

But perils such as these only arise out of our misinterpretation of the silence of the kingdom. We need to learn at least this much, that the silence of the kingdom is part of its positive and elemental truth. It is born of its profound and eternal meaning. It belongs to its actual equipment. It is a term in its eternal message and ministry to the heart of the world. The key to its meaning and treasure is faith in the unseen and unutterable realities that dwell at the heart of the gospel. We need ever to be refreshing our minds and hearts with the great thoughts of the kingdom—the facts that focalize for

us all and for ever the Light of the World. They are pardon, peace, holiness, and sacrifice. They deal with the fundamental needs of human souls and the ultimate basis of personal integrity and social integration. They move, do these great things, with passionless authority and unfaltering mien amid the profundities of our spiritual nature. They fathom our need and answer all our voiceless pleading. Beyond, as well as within, the range of speech and the domain of reason, their light shines and their power avails. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation because these things are the very life and being of it.

The silence of the kingdom is laden, for every earnest, faithful heart, not with vague mystery, but with undubitable truth. It does not waken the idea of exploration, but of centrality. It is compact of finality as well as possibility. Jesus always dealt with final things. He transformed the conscience and thought and will and character of the world. The issue of His coming may be read and known of all. He is writing His

gospel on the world's face, but He writes it first in the world's heart. He touches the inward things. He dominates the inward place. He brings the real and secret selfhood of the world into touch with the tremendous silent forces of love and truth and hope.

Though it cometh not with observation, this kingdom of God in the earth, yet is not its silence unobtrusive and lowly. Though it may be likened to the springing corn, yet its silence is not merely germinal and evolutionary. The kingdom comes with superb glory and with regal sanctions and claims. It is not a vast evolution, it is a vast revolution. But the glory is not always girt with hosannas, nor is the great change effected and sealed in the way that men in their least spiritual hours are prone to think it should be.





## IX

### THE SILENT COMING OF THE KINGDOM—(*continued*)



## IX

### THE SILENT COMING OF THE KINGDOM— (continued)

*He shall not strive nor cry aloud ; neither shall any one hear His voice in the streets.*—MATT. xii. 19 (cf. ISA. xlii. 2).

*And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth.*—MARK iv. 26.

*The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.*—LUKE xvii. 20.

MAYBE there are many who need to ponder much upon the silent coming of the kingdom of God. In some sense or other we all need to do so. The silent things are the soonest lost count of and the most easily discredited, especially in these noisy years. The world about us is often loud, arrogant, self-advertising. It believes in this way of life. It deems these things necessary to real progress. Noise and display are real and serious parts of its programme.

It shouts its claims. It parades its activities. It has no faith in any silent, unseen thing. It assails our eyes and ears. It has nothing to show our hearts. And it is perilously possible for us, though we are called to live and work by the hidden things of faith and love, to try to flaunt and clamour too. We need to remind ourselves that we do not, that we cannot, meet this world's needs by taking a leaf out of this world's book. We can the rather unfit ourselves to meet those needs. We may come to think more about the volume of our voice than about the truth of our message. We may be in danger of trying to shout the world down, challenging its clangour rather than its conscience. We may find ourselves judging spiritual tasks by unspiritual standards, and attempting to fulfil them by unspiritual methods.

*'And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth.'* The sower is in alliance with the silent, cryptic forces of life. He casts in the seed, and by and by he gathers the harvest; but in the meantime he trusts that which no man has

ever explained—the mystery of life. Behind all his effort there lies that which he cannot do, and cannot even understand. He knows enough to teach him a quiet hope through many signless days. He is wise enough to read the meaning of the first faint film of green softly drawn over the brown earth. He moves with hope and confidence in his kingdom because, having done his small but essential duty, he knows how vast and sure are those silent forces with which that duty has linked him. So, said the Master, is it with the kingdom of God. The vital, essential forces are not the things most in evidence. We may be very busy, but if our business has no relation to them it is a profitless thing. Christian service is not a daring, desperate venture; it is a sure alliance. It is not guerdoned by our originality, our energy, or our determination, but by our faith. We are slow to learn that leaving our work with God is a real part of our doing that work. We can trust the plough and the harrow and the seed-basket—but not the silence.

But faith in the silence of the kingdom is not manifested in a mere marking time ; still less is it to be regarded as a test of discipline arbitrarily imposed upon mankind in its spiritual service. The silence is compact of active, irresistible reality. It is the most living and positive thing in all the world. We can only honour it and keep in touch with it as we ourselves are positive in our faith and strenuous in our endeavour. Only we must ever take care lest the very strenuousness of our work should weaken our vital contact with all that which is ours not merely according to the measure of our exertion, but according to the measure of conviction and our spiritual confidence. The serious and vivid concern of the Christian Church to-day in social conditions and the social outlook will probably prove itself to be a great factor in the deepening and establishment of the Church's faith ; but there is always a danger lest with some it should be otherwise. Nothing is better founded than the expectation and the claim that the coming of the kingdom should visibly

and permanently reconstruct all in life that needs reconstruction; that it should purge our politics, reconstitute our social order, and transform this wrong and withered world. But we cannot see these glorious things coming to pass; we cannot even believe that they ever will come to pass, unless the silence of the kingdom has gripped our souls, unless we have learned to dwell amid its heroic things, and to feel the irresistible movement of its quiet forces. It is much to be in the fight for the kingdom, and to take account of every conquest. It is much to recognize the immediate applications of spiritual power and to reckon up the spoils of this holy warfare. But there is a place beyond processes and beyond results where God in His great love would surely teach us to dwell. There is a faith that leans not on the fortunes of the fight, and bides not the arbitrament of the years. It is born in the place of silence.

*‘He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets.’* We behold in Christ the great antagonist of sin.

We hail Him as our Leader. And we cannot but know that there is no wrong in all the world with which He does not grapple, nor injustice He does not condemn. But we do not understand Christ as the antagonist of sin saving as we behold Him the calm, victorious Saviour of the world. '*I have overcome the world.*' Only immortal Love could say that. The victory of Jesus is a profound and most inward thing. He is the source and mediator of that eternal truth that speaks to the human soul in the language of infinite compassion, all-searching judgement, and illimitable hope. Right at the heart of things His kingdom works, right through the heart of things His kingdom comes, right in the heart of things His kingdom is being for ever established. There is a place of toil and tumult where we follow our Captain; but if we are to follow Him there, we must first meet Him and clasp His hand in the place of faith and vision, the place of silence; and know that we go forth to no doubtful issue, for we have the hand-clasp of Him whose victory is already won.



In dwelling, as we have dwelt, upon the silences of Jesus, we have had many things brought to our minds that may be of some service to us ; we seek better to understand His perfect character, and better to live our imperfect life. But, as I have tried in these closing words to point out, the cumulative effect of such meditations as these should surely be to deepen and stablsh our faith in all the silent forces of the Christian faith and of the spiritual world. All the inner things of the heart have a worth and a meaning for this poor world, apart from and beyond our ability to express them in language and our success in translating them into deed. The unutterable is a vital part of the Christian argument. The gift of clear speech is not for us all, no matter how some of us may strive after it ; but clearer than the clearest speech is the message of a life guerdoned with the last deep simplicity of the Christian peace and the Christian love. If we fail to do our part in winning this world for Jesus Christ, we must look for the causes of our failure not

among the things we are not eloquent enough to utter, but among the things we are not wise enough to believe or pure enough to possess. If amid the silent things—love, faith, character, influence—we move with sure steps, then life for us has no vain hour and no final bafflement.

## ST. PAUL'S HYMN TO LOVE

1 COR. xiii.

"Swirl, one star above & all would shall brighten  
Leading for ever where the Lord is laid  
One Revelation through all yon enlight  
Steps of bewilderment & eyes afraid.

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"Ay, & when Prophecy her tale hath finishe  
Knowledge hath withered from the tremble  
Love shall Survive & Love be undiminish'd  
Love be imperishable, Love be young."

My own: St Paul.



I  
A FOREWORD



# I

## A FOREWORD

IN this great Hymn to Love we search in vain for a definition of love. This is wholly encouraging. This shows us that the writer knew something about love. The last proof of knowledge is not the power to define. There is a knowledge that begins where definition ends. This is the highest and the holiest knowledge of all. It is not the indefinite, but the indefinable; it is not the vagueness of a confused mind, it is the breathless wonder of a listening and a learning heart. No man can see his way to the highest truth. He has to feel his way there. No man has gone as far as he might have gone in his quest for truth who has not taken at least a few steps past his own

definitions. We begin by thinking of truth as something easily formulated, detachable, capable of being neatly packed for transit. We stretch out our hands for it as for a gift, and do not know that we are reaching out after the universe. It is the infinite within us grasping at the infinite beyond us, and all that is a situation that a thousand definitions will never satisfy. We begin by trying to define things that we may understand them; then we find ourselves trying to understand things that we may define them. Definition ceases to be our starting-point and becomes rather our goal. But by and by we learn something else. We learn that knowledge at its best is not a matter of definitions. If a man has truly defined a thing he has mastered it. May we not even say, from the standpoint of the learner, he has outgrown it? The mind is greater than its definitions, and the heart—well, it is as Pascal says: ‘The heart has its reasons that the reason does not know.’ Our whole spiritual nature is involved in all our spiritual knowledge, and it is not a



matter to be wondered at, but rather to be expected, that we should so often find ourselves looking for something more luminous and vital than a definition.

May we not liken our definitions to vessels shaped by our own hands for our own uses ? In them we seek to store the waters of truth. But sometimes we drain the vessel and are thirsty still. It does not hold enough. Our necessities are always correcting our definitions. And sometimes the outpoured water of life fills and overflows the vessel we hold, and we know the truth is larger than we have named it. If yesterday our definition failed because it did not hold as much as we needed, to-day it fails because it cannot hold as much as we have.

There are times when definition is destructive. Who ever questioned the beauty of the sunset ? But who can define it ? The astronomer can give us the mathematics of it. There doubtless is mathematics in the sunset ; but there is no sunset glory in the mathematics. There is a chemistry of colours ; but there is no wistful, healing light in

that chemistry. Beauty defined is beauty destroyed. Let a man say he will not merely draw near to it, but he will seize its very heart, he will unveil its inmost essence—and, lo! his grasping fingers close upon nothing. In our search for truth we must learn to understand the veil; we must know that it is not something to be torn aside. It is always there, it always must be there. We must always be reverently passing into it, for it is not a thin curtain, easily rent, and that once for all; it is the vastness and wonder and solemn shadow of the truth itself.

The picture of the truth bursting through the bondage of definition is not without meaning, but it is truer to say that truth in its length and breadth and everlastingness goes free of all our puny bonds. So when St. Paul draws near to that which he is fain to call the greatest of all great things, something greater than faith and hope, shall we not be the better prepared to listen to his communings, the more ready to strain our eyes to behold his visions, for that he wrongs not the vastness of his

theme by seeking to measure it with the measure of his thought and to bind it in the bondage of his words ?

There is no need to justify St. Paul's mode of approach to his great task. It justifies itself. But it is worth noting that the path he takes to the heart of things is the only path by which most men can hope to advance, and a path that every man in his intensest striving after truth is fain to tread. There is a philosophic approach to truth. But it is never, even at its best, more than an approach. It is like a path winding high among the hills. There are long vistas and glimmering horizons, but often the traveller stands on a perilous ledge, and the mist is in his face, and there is no home-light to greet his eyes no matter how far he climbs. There is a path that winds among many subtleties, a veritable maze. Here and there one finds a man who is happy in it, and even claiming to be making progress ; but most men, if they have the ill-hap to strike that path, count it a happy day that sees them quit of it again. But there is a path to truth that lies right through the

throng of life's familiar things, never far from the murmur of the daily round, a path wherein one may sometimes gather old-time flowers and gaze upon well-read faces. And the one word over its immemorial gateway is the word 'Experience.' And this is the path the Apostle takes. Here in this great chapter there are no analyses, no abstractions, no speculations. Here is all the murmur and the colour of life. We are not asked to ponder love that haply we may by and by think some clear thought about it. We are not asked to study love as an abstraction. We are asked to walk with love, a kindly, kingly presence, to hear how love says the thing that must be said day by day, to see how love does the thing that must be done day by day, to see how love endures the thing that must be endured day by day; to watch how love stoops low beneath its brother's burden, and keeps that silence that is more full and availing than speech.

Surely this is the best way to come at love's true meaning—indeed, to come to the true meaning of anything. To find out what life

is we watch what life does. Activity is the revelation of essence.

And let us just note that St. Paul's way of speaking about love gives us a clue to the reason why he speaks about it at all. He has no philosophic interest in the matter. He does not set out merely to instruct us, but to inspire us. He does not seek merely to fill our mind with thoughts about love, but rather to fill our lives with love itself.

And no man shall ever read these glowing words about love, and the worth of it, and the ways of it, in the way they should be read, reverently and quietly and often, but he shall find himself passing where no mere exposition could ever take him—into that inner place where the light of hope and faith, of duty and sacrifice, of vision and of toil, the hearth-light and the heaven-light merge into one all-mysterious and wholly satisfying light—the light of love, which is for us and ever shall be the shining of the face of God.



II  
THE ONENESS OF LOVE





## II

### THE ONENESS OF LOVE

WE have seen that St. Paul aims at giving us not a definition but a conception of love. True, he speaks of love, as it were, in detail. He shows love to us in the performance of definite concrete services indicative of its nature. He sets it forth in its relation to divers powers of life, and in its opposition to divers forms of self-centred conduct. But all the way through this lyric passage the part exists for the whole. Every phrase, every word brings its gift of light, enlarging and enriching our conception of that great Something that all the words and phrases together cannot finally express. We must not give ourselves too soon or too eagerly to the study of words and phrases. So doing we shall miss

the great central thoughts of this chapter, and missing them we cannot find the deepest and most timeless meaning of any and every separate fragment of teaching herein contained. Let us look first of all and chiefly for the few great ideas that this passage embodies, around which its more detailed teaching naturally arranges itself.

The refrain of the first three verses is this : *'If I have not love.'* And the vision of life without love is a vision of vanity and emptiness. Love is the secret of vitality. It is the essence of true life. It is so vast and mighty and inclusive a principle that apart from it the forms and forces of life are void and meaningless. Then in verses four and five love is set forth as the secret of character. There is no real virtue that is not born of love. There is no true patience save the patience of love, no true contentment save the contentment of love, no true humility save the humility of love, no true self-sacrifice save the self-sacrifice of love. Then come some buoyant and triumphant words about love bearing, believing, hoping, and enduring all things.

This is the optimism of love. Out of this optimism comes love's masterful defiances of pain and wrong, its unwearying conciliations, its hold upon a handful of deathless hopes.

Then suddenly another light flashes across the page, a light that has travelled farther than anything else that gleams there. It is eternal light. '*Love never faileth.*' We have known optimists who have outlived their optimism. This world of ours has seen so many fair things lose their beauty, so many pure things their purity, so many humble things their humility. Write it, then, O disillusioned world, across this latest and fairest gospel of all, the gospel of love—'*love never faileth.*'

But even this great word about love, the untiring and undying, does not complete the picture. We have yet some way to go ere we come to the confines of the ineffable. The Apostle takes us on, and shows us love the goal of life and its fulfilment. Love is to bring us to our full stature and real powers. Love is to bring us into the nameless mystery

of immediate knowledge of God. Through it shall the soul find perfect communion with Him. '*Then shall I know even as also I have been known.*'

These, then, are the central thoughts of the great Hymn of Love. Round them all the other thoughts gather, and in them and behind them lies the most lofty and spiritual conception of love ever given to the world. To find out, as far as may be, what the conception is, will be our continuous task in these studies. It cannot at the best be more than suggested. When we bring a sprig of heather from the moorland we do not pretend that we have captured the glory and mystery of those miles upon miles of purple bloom. And we learn, as we range on the wide and windy hills of truth, not to claim too much for the poor little bunch of phrases we bring back and offer to our brother.

Before we come to read this hymn line by line and word for word there are one or two thoughts about love of a somewhat general character that it may be well for us to bear in mind. *Love* is one. It is a unity. The

Greeks had several words for it. *Eros*, the love of beauty, love that is fired with passion and laden with desire; *philia*, the love of a man for his friend, and more quiet and less selfish emotion; *philodelphia*, used only of actual kinship and *philanthropia*; a kindly attitude towards mankind, something more general in its operation than *eros* and *philia*. The word in this great Christian hymn of love is none of these. *Agape* is not found in any of the heathen writers. It is a word that Trench describes as having been 'born within the bosom of revealed religion.' By reason of its birthright it has meanings that set it lofty and lonely amid all other attempts to utter the master word of human life. Its uniqueness we shall not easily miss. One has but to compare the *Agape* of St. Paul with the *Eros* of Greek tragedy to see what gulf of difference can lie between words, and how an idea can be cleansed, and lifted, and amplified. Love in Greek tragedy is a kind of madness, a destructive and disastrous obsession. It is often a minister of confusion and of despair. Love in this great Christian

hymn is the ideal sanity of life. It is the basal principle of spiritual health. It stands for all that is permanent and peaceful. It is the supreme constructive force of life. It is the maker of character and the revealer of truth. It is the secret of development and the pledge of fulfilment. It glows with the fire of a great passion, a passion that consumes not the life in which it burns, as does the flame of Eros, but rather all the mean, dark, shameful things that are morally alien to that life.

So the love whereof the Apostle sings may be shown immeasurably to excel all other emotions and responses that bear this great name; but on the other hand it may be shown to be that which truly co-ordinates and spiritually vitalizes every mode and fashion love is capable of assuming. It makes some kinship between love of beauty in the earth and love for the beauty of holiness. It makes the love that desires and the love that renounces parts of the same great mystery. If love to man and love to God are two essentially different things, then the

name 'Father' gives no clue to the heart of the Eternal. If the love that lights our homes is in nowise related to the love that makes heaven, then heaven can have no meaning for us.

But it is only in God that the oneness of love is a vital truth for the world. A man may have 'a passion for flowers,' and yet his soul may be a flowerless garden. He may give himself for his own little child, and at the same time wrong his heavenly Father day by day. But let him know that love which is St. Paul's theme, and he shall find that there is no channel of his life through which it cannot flow. It shall make the response to beauty an act of worship, and family affection a sacrament of a divine communion. So the love of which we are thinking is not a thing apart from all else that we have ever called love and recognized as love. It is love lifted to the highest degree, love that in its ampler and purer life can find no self-expression, no satisfaction, save in obedience and worship to God; that can find no altar whereon to lay its sacrifice but the altar of that

temple whereof the name is 'God is here';  
that can find no service but that selfless  
service of God in the brotherhood that  
is the earthly sacrament of the Christly  
life.



III  
LIFE WITHOUT LOVE



### III

#### LIFE WITHOUT LOVE

I COR. xiii. 1-3.

THE Apostle begins by picturing Life without Love. Not content with taking life as men live it, for the moment he invests it with ideal and almost unimaginable virtues and powers. He suggests to us a life that possesses not only a mastery of earthly language, but even the melting cadences of some celestial herald. He suggests an insight into the mystery of life and a hold upon its knowledge such as no one has ever attained unto. He shows us a faith that knows no impossibilities ; a generosity—or that which has the appearance of such—that beggars itself for the poor ; and at last shows us the flames of a martyr fire devouring a life

consenting to the agony. All this seems to leave our actual equipment and experience far behind. It is meant to do so. We are to behold a life crowned with powers and services of which a man dare scarcely dream. We are to suppose but one thing wanting in this life, and that thing is love. '*If I have not love.*' And, lo! without love the eloquence is meaningless, the knowledge is empty, and the sacrifice of no worth.

Let us look, then, at the one great simple claim that St. Paul makes on behalf of love. It lies behind all this that he says about tongues and prophecy, alms-giving and martyrdom. We must get past them to come to it. Other gifts might have been named, other powers of life might have been suggested, other forms of equipment might easily have found a place here. It does not for the moment matter what gifts and ministries are here set forth. Not that they were chosen at haphazard. There is a strain of local interest and significance running through some of them. But first of all let us find the deep, tremendous implication, and even

contention, of these opening verses. It is this. Love is the life of all that lives. Without it life is, in a very profound sense, inarticulate, valueless, and unreal. In its final analysis, in the fulfilment of its highest nature, in its farthest extension, life is love.

Us with no other gospel Thou ensnarest,  
Fiend from beneath, or angel from above,  
Knowing one thing the sacredest and fairest,  
Knowing Thee is not anything but love.

Love is not a precious quality of life, it is life itself. It is basal and essential. We begin to live when we begin to love. The loveless are the lifeless. Take love from out the treasures of life, and there is nothing left. Much may seem to be left; but no treasure is a treasure until love makes it one. In life's final valuation all things shall take rank according to the measure of love that is in them. That is to say, they shall be judged according to the measure of life they have attained unto, for love is life at its highest. We cannot justly separate love from anything that belongs to the perfect morality and divinity of life. To set the

moral order over against the life of love, to suggest that either of these can live alone, is to misinterpret both. God is love. Love in its purest form, and in some degree in every form that can be acknowledged as in any sense worthy the name, is the inflowing of His life into the world and the outflowing of the world's life unto Him. Love is something more than morality, but it essentially includes it. Love is moral. It has complete respect unto the perfect moral nature of God. The lovelessness of life is the immorality of life.

*'If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.'* These words had a particular meaning for the Corinthian Church. They were to some extent determined by the claims of a situation which was extraordinary, and is not likely to occur again. A strange phenomenon had appeared among the members of the church at Corinth. Apparently it was a kind of ecstasy, under the influence of which a person expressed his religious emotions in speech which those hearing it could not understand, and which

the speaker himself could not always interpret. The exact nature of this ecstatic devotion it is hardly possible to determine; nor would a complete explanation, if such were possible, be of any great value to us for our present purpose. It is important to know why the Apostle mentions it here. The reason is this. The gift of ecstatic utterance was too highly prized among the members of the Church. Those who were the subjects of this form of emotion prided themselves upon it not a little. The Apostle sought to correct this false estimate. In another part of his letter he puts it to them that surely the intelligible is worth more than the unintelligible. But here he goes deeper than that. So deep indeed that he finds a word for all men everywhere. It is no strain on the spirit of these opening words of the hymn to allow the phrase, 'tongues of men and of angels,' once it is taken beyond its local and temporary meaning, to stand for the widest and fullest range of expression imaginable. Can we not come through it to the whole question of utterance? If

all the powers and forms of human speech were mine, yea, and if I could attain unto the nameless eloquence and melting cadences of some celestial herald, yet, without love, my speech, and the music and the meaning thereof, is as the inarticulate clangour of brass and the harsh clash of cymbals.

The gift of tongues, in this larger sense, has always been an overprized and misused gift among men. The power to talk is sometimes so satisfying to its possessor that he overlooks the necessity of having something to say, and the more vital necessity of having a good reason for saying it. And, lo! across the tinkling music of skilled speech and the tumult of the brazen-throated a great silence is struck. It is all no good *if I have not love*. The power of expression is not determined by the length of a man's vocabulary, but by the depth of his heart. The current that carries meaning from one life to another is not a flow of words, even such diction as might grace the lips of an angel, but a flow of sympathetic and selfless interest in another; and the spring from



which that stream flows is the heart of Jesus Christ, Lover of souls.

Within strait limits, and in ways that but imperfectly illustrate the working out of the principle, we know the value of love as a means of mutual understanding. It is the great interpreter. Self-expression is only possible so far as the inner and the outer air of life are charged with it. It is the medium through which all life's true giving and receiving goes on. '*The tongues of men and of angels*' is a phrase not wholly remote from the practical issues of life. There is a universal language of love. The very refinements and subtleties of speech may only obscure the thing spoken, if love be wanting: Yea, the truest refinement of language is wrought by love. There is a St. Chrysostom hidden away in every man, for it is the golden heart that makes the golden mouth. So, turning the Apostle's suggestion the other way about, we may say that, having love, one has the beginning of a language that is ever understood of men, and that sounds not strangely in the ear of heaven.



## IV

### LIFE WITHOUT LOVE—(*continued*)



## IV

### LIFE WITHOUT LOVE—(*continued*)

THE Apostle continues his plea for love as the one essential of life in three pictures—loveless knowledge, loveless faith, and loveless service. It goes without saying that in each case we are involved in a deep and abiding contradiction. Without love no man could be a prophet, interpreting life to men in the terms of its eternal significance (and surely the prophet is the man who holds before men's eyes the essential truth concerning the present rather than a dim outline of the future); much less could a man gather into his mind the whole sweep of the divine revelation and the whole treasure of earthly knowledge, and bear through all his questing and learning the thick darkness of a loveless heart.

And if Love is essential to true knowledge, it is equally essential to true faith. That mastery over life's difficulties that is suggested in the proverbial figure of removing mountains can never for a moment be associated with lack of love. If love is vision, it is also power. If it is the secret of seeing, it is also the secret of doing. And so with the last of the three pictures, where a man is represented as giving his whole substance to the poor and his body to the fire. Such an offering no loveless heart could bring. I do not think that St. Paul ever wished his readers to imagine for a moment that such things could be. They are frankly impossible. With regard to the words 'to be burned,' some doubt exists. There is another reading strongly supported, 'that I may boast.' But even if this latter reading had the stronger support, it would be the weaker reading. It robs the Apostle's words of any sense of climax. After the picture of a prophet compassing the realms of divine and human knowledge, a soul so confident that the mountains of difficulty shake and pass away

before its victorious assurance, a servant of men stripping himself of his possessions to meet the needs of others, surely the picture of a man seeking martyrdom as a means to self-glorification seems but a poor thing to suggest. The act is too radically and obviously selfish to give any force to the Apostle's argument. For he is bent on showing how that if it were possible to scale all the heights of learning, faith, and sacrifice without the aid of love, the achievement would be empty. It is love that gives not only strength to the climber, but glory to the climb. But although for the sake of a tremendous emphasis thereby secured the Apostle outlines an impossible equipment for life, yet each picture that he draws has a very direct message for life as men live it and know it to be.

The world has had its loveless prophets, its unsympathetic seers, its cold philosophers. The intellectual life seems to be in a position to undertake the great task of human development and to offer men many deep and lasting satisfactions. And it is easy to overestimate

the formative power of knowledge by itself. The Apostle says, 'If I *have* . . . all knowledge but not love, I am nothing.' A thousand things go to tell the story of what a man *has* ; but love alone, or the lack of it, determines what he *is*. Without love I am nothing. Love is the one vital bond between me and mine. Many things can give me gifts of wisdom, but only love can make me wise. Love is the great assimilative and constructive principle in human life. It is life's true culture. By the grace of it all that a man may learn of things heavenly or things earthly is built into his soul ; and so his knowledge, instead of being a burden under which he stoops, becomes unto him increase of stature and strength for the way.

'*If I have all faith.*' Faith without love has done much to embitter the life of the world. It has been the secret of the harsh dogmatism, the narrow interpretation, the unlovely life of many a one who has claimed to represent the spirit and practice, the authority and the ideal, of the Christian Church. Wherever in the same life you find deep convictions and



shallow sympathies you have the possibility of much unconscious cruelty. Once James and John asked the Master to rain fire upon an unfriendly Samaritan village. They had faith to believe He could do so ; but, alas for the love that should have taught them that He could not ! If loveless faith addresses itself to the task of removing mountains, it often removes them from its own path only to set them down in its brother's path ; yea, and if a few souls be crushed in the process of this great feat of faith, what matter ? Faith may make a thing possible of accomplishment, but only love can make it worth doing and well done.

*‘ And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing. ’* I do not think the Apostle wishes us to imagine such complete selflessness being attained by a loveless soul. Some commentators ransack history to find a case in which a man has given himself to the flames without one thought of love to prompt the action or to uphold him in the pain. Surely this is a waste of time.

Do not these extreme and graphic pictures teach us that love is the sweet and living secret of all our human service ?

Not what we give, but what we share,  
For the gift without the giver is bare.  
Who gives himself with his gift feeds three—  
Himself, his hungering neighbour, and Me.

Love is the law of help. Sometimes philanthropy, or that which poses as such, is a substitute for sympathy. There are many who have yet to learn that it costs more than an intermittent, spasmodic dribble of six-pences to put them right with the need of the world. St. Paul teaches us that putting oneself right with the brotherhood is not such a cheap and mechanical performance. The lesson we need to learn, perhaps, is not the futility of giving away *all* our possessions—a course of conduct that would not occur to many people—but the futility of giving away *any part* of them unless the gifts be symbols of brotherhood, sacraments of sympathy. We are constantly being reminded nowadays that we pauperize people by our gifts. Must we, then, let them struggle on and suffer more ?

Yes, very likely we must. But woe to that man who, as he puts back his gift into his purse, shuts up his sympathies in his own heart. It may be wrong to give a needy man your money, but it is a hundredfold more wrong to deny him your sympathy. The world must struggle on, but we must learn to share its struggle and its pain. We must enter into the final secret of all hungry, homeless men. And it is only as we give them the living bread of love, and find them a place in the warmth of our heart, and know their hunger and their homelessness with a sadness akin to their own, that we can be trusted to find for them ways of help that shall be free from all disability and dishonour.



V

LOVE AND THE HARD WAY



## V

### LOVE AND THE HARD WAY

1 COR. xiii. 4.

WE have considered the great claim that St. Paul makes on behalf of love. We have heard his answer to the suggestion, ‘*If I have not love.*’ He has shown love to us as the basal principle of true life. He has carried us upward beyond the last flight of human eloquence, and has made us listen to the voices of the angels, that we may know that the music of heaven’s speech is the music of love. He has taken us to the heights whereon only the world’s prophets can stand, and has told us they stood there by the grace of love. And beyond those heights he has bidden us look upward where mightier mountains hide their heads in the clouds; and, lo!

love is the name of the farthest peak, and love is the only guidance never at fault, and the only strength never outworn for all to whom that mist-wrapped summit calls. Love has been set before us as the only prize that makes the mystery of life worth unravelling and the wisdom of life worth gathering. And the highest victory of faith is vain if it be not flushed with the light of love, which same light is the beauty of all that is generous and the glory of all that is heroic.

That, in a few words, is the message as far as we have read it. But if that had been all the Apostle had had to say about love, the very sweep and finality of his message might have rendered it in part ineffective. There are things we miss in life because they are so fractional or so rare, but there are also things we miss because they are so complete and universal. One of the things that is hardest to find is the thing that is everywhere. If our ear cannot hear the vibrant flight of some tiny insect, neither can it hear the vast earth swinging through space. We are just as liable to miss the infinite as the infinitesimal.



I once saw the Lord's Prayer written in the space covered by a threepenny-piece. If that same prayer had been written across the space of a thousand acres it would have been just as hard to read. We cannot grasp the greatness of a thing till that same greatness has been expressed in the terms of experience. It is not enough to tell a man that a thing is essential. You must give him some means of recognizing the essential in his daily life.

That is just what St. Paul does for us in this great hymn to love—love that is at the core of life, love that goes out to the verge of life, and beyond it. Suddenly he turns our gaze from the high places of speech, from the Horebs and Carmels of history, from the great princes of the faith before whom the mountains of difficulty shake and bow themselves, from the lonely heroes whose faces are lighted with the glowing fires of pain, and brings us face to face with the world as we so well know it, and with life as we know we live it. For no man can read these words :  
*' Love suffereth long and is kind ; love envieth not ; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

*doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own,*' without reading between the lines a description of a world he knows too well where things are not so. We know a world that has little patience or kindness, a world that takes no pleasure in a brother's prosperity but rather finds bitterness in the thought of it, an envious world. And there we meet many a thing that flaunts its pretensions in our faces, many an inflated thing, many an unseemly thing. And, lo! the singer shows us love, a beautiful figure, sweet-faced, soft-spoken, tender in touch, a very poem of grace and fitness, come down from the prophetic and heroic heights, or perhaps we should say come up from the divine depths of human life. Be that as it may, we see love passing through this world of ours, a living, holy presence, and waiting with winsome, heavenly grace on the threshold of each house of life. We see it in a world that is very impatient of affronts, of real or seeming wrongs, and we wait for what it has to say amid the petulant complainings, the diatribes and denunciations, the vindictive

outbursts, and the long, low mutterings of vengeance. And it has nothing to say at all. Love, against whom all these wrongs are done; love, in whose heart all the sharp points of this world's cruelty meet; love, that bows beneath the heaviest burden, has no comment to make but that of a great silence. '*Love suffereth long.*' That is the greatest comment any man can make upon life. There is no judgement of life so valuable as that of calm patience; no criticism of life so deep as the criticism of endurance.

Why does love suffer long? Chiefly because it suffers deeply. The wrongs that are most loudly noised in life, and most swiftly avenged, are its surface wrongs. So the trivial becomes the unpardonable. Men refuse to forgive the thing that scarcely *needs* to be forgiven, and accept a cheap apology for the thing that scarcely *can* be forgiven. The world, in its complaining, is like a child crying bitterly over a scratched finger. Love, in its silence, is like the hero with a grievous wound, keeping the secret of his pain, lest he should shadow the hope-light on his brother's

face. The years by themselves cannot bring us to the true manhood and womanhood of life. Growing up is not automatic and inevitable. Some people grow old without growing up. They never reach the stage where life becomes able to offer to the world sweet endurance and brave silence. We do not come there by the flight of time. We come there by the lowly, steadfast pilgrimage of love. And love brings us there not merely by showing us the need for patient endurance and the gift of silence, but the value of these things. There is a great positive purpose in the longsuffering of love. '*Love suffereth long and is kind.*' It is not a question of unlimited passive capability. Love is not love because it suffers long. It is love because in its suffering it is kind. We must linger on this word for a moment. It has so many shades of meaning. It is put to so many trivial uses. In the vocabulary of convention it often means very little. In this hymn it means so much. It is raised to its highest power. It means to have a passion for usefulness—to be wholly disposed to place

oneself at the service of others. The long-suffering of love is just the negative side of its service of others. Its kindness is the positive side of that service. The world suffereth long and is grim, is bitter, is full of self-pity. Love endures because it knows how infinitely worth while it is to endure. In the long-suffering of love there is never a bitter or a vengeful thought. There is ever a large and true sense of the need and pathos and unspoken pleading of human life that can only be met by those who, in the freedom of love, can leave their rights and wrongs with God, and find the leisure of unselfishness wherein to serve their brethren.

To endure may be a feat of sheer determination; it may even be a triumph of obstinacy. But to endure—not with silence but with tender speech, not with set grimness but with simple cheerfulness, not sitting apart with a passion of resentment waiting to burst forth, but mingling with the life of the world for the world's comfort and help,—this is the long-suffering of love.



VI  
LOVE AND LOWLINESS





## V I

### LOVE AND LOWLINESS

I COR. xiii. 4.

‘*LOVE envieth not.*’ Life is full of inequalities. In its calculable resources and its manifest issues, one life differs mysteriously from another. The fact is so obvious that no one can miss it. Besides, we are not disposed to miss it. We seek it out and look into it and ponder it. There is one view of life that every man takes—that is the comparative view. And that view is sometimes a source of pain and bafflement and manifold hindrance to the man who takes it. There is nothing more instructive than comparison as long as it is impersonal. ‘Comparisons are odious,’ saith the proverb. As a record of the way things too often work out, that is sadly near the truth.

But the 'odious' in a comparison comes not of the practice itself, but of the spirit in which it is carried out. Granted a perfect character, there is no peril in the comparative mood. Only love can be trusted to make comparisons. If they are made in any mind save the mind of love, they are apt to distil the poison of envy and to produce the deadly by-products of discontent, jealousy, and ingratitude. Love alone comes unscathed from the sharp test of life's inequalities. Love alone knows the secret of a sweet, wholesome, and profitable philosophy of comparison.

'*Love envieth not.*' Why? There are many answers. Let us look at two or three round which most of the rest can be gathered. Where the world-spirit is most envious—that is to say, among the earthly gifts and gains—love has no temptation to envy. Its definition of good, its standard of attainment, its goal of desire, are not found among these things. We do not envy those who possess less than ourselves, or who reap their harvest of success in the fields of shame. Love lives and works on a plane of feeling and judgement

where the things that most commonly engender envy in men's hearts form no real part of the sum of life. Part of the high wisdom of love is the art of elimination. When the love that is God calls to a man's heart, the voices of a thousand pleasures sound harsh and strident in his ears. He has a new sense of music. When we say that the Christian renounces the world, we must not overestimate the pain of that renunciation. There is a sense of relief in it. There is the logic of a new valuation. There is many a thing not loosed reluctantly from the hands, but trampled heedlessly beneath the feet. It was only good enough to be trodden under foot. It was only worthy to be ignored. Love has its kingdom and its high estate and its fair dwelling-place. It turns its eyes from beholding the lordly and glittering places of the worldlings, not for fear of dazzlement, but for a steadier gaze upon some better thing.

Then, again, love's attitude toward life precludes the envious spirit. Love lives not to get, but to give. Therefore the

eyes of love are ever upon those that have not rather than upon those that have. Love is most of all alive to that which is wanting in the life of another. It is not so much concerned with measuring men's fullness as with meeting their needs. Envy is in its whole nature selfish. It has no power over any man who by the grace of Christ has passed beyond the standpoint of selfishness. Nothing in the Christian religion, the religion with love for its root and its blossom, is more beautiful to behold than is the wonderful way it makes a man's wealth dependent upon his generosity. It measures his gains by his gifts, makes his success implicit in his sacrifice, and uses only the selfless threads of his thought and purpose wherewith to weave the strand of his joy. '*Love envieth not.*' To envy would be to die. And yet again, love realizes the oneness of life, and knows something of that profound truth veiled from the eyes of a selfish world, that in all the things worth desiring and possessing, no man shall ever be denied some share if he but seek it. And in the

world wherein love dwells, the gain of one is the gain of all.

*‘Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.’*

Those words give a still deeper meaning to those that have gone before them. A man may have little envy because he has vast self-satisfaction. He may not look greedily upon his brother’s life because he looks boastfully upon his own. There are such things as mutually exclusive vices. A man cannot be at once a miser and a spendthrift, and if he is the one it is no virtue in him that he is not the other. The value of a man’s attitude towards others is determined by the nature of his attitude towards himself. Love is lowly minded. Love that looks with such unenvying eyes through the window of life’s little room has seen nothing in that room to justify one swelling thought of pride. It knows the room is small and bare. It is well content if the room can but be kept clean. Love has no delusions about itself. It is not buoyed up by a palatial sense of its own importance. But, for all this, the inner truth about the humility

of love is to be found in its greatness. The great things never vaunt themselves. One cannot conceive of the greatest thing in the world being puffed up. There is no motive for self-inflation. We speak sometimes of empty boasting. There is no other kind of boasting. The very nature and essence of a boast is emptiness. Men may vaunt themselves about what they have, but they vaunt themselves *because* of what they have not. It is a mere truism to say of any man that he has nothing to boast of. No man ever had anything to boast of. Boasting is always an advertisement of poverty. Love lives at the heart of things. Love has its hand upon the whole treasure of life. It enters ever more and more into the measureless spiritual inheritance of the soul.

One is tempted to go into detail concerning the humility of love. Upon what does this inflated world free its boastful spirit? Sometimes upon its relation to a duke, especially if the relationship be a very distant or doubtful one. But love has a genealogy and a heraldry all its own. It recognizes something higher

even than kingship, and that is brotherhood. And love has many brothers. In the world of love the saints wear the coronets. And love is the friend of all the saints.

Sometimes the world flaunts its power to command service. But love knows that the greatest among men is not he who can demand the largest portion of other men's strength, but he who can take upon his own shoulders the largest measure of other men's weakness. This world is puffed up with its knowledge and its achievements. Its greatness is that of an *inflated* and not that of an *exalted* thing. Love has a twofold vision. It looks upward into the face of God, whose name is love, and then down into the face of man, whose life is toil and sorrow. It feels the power of the ideal and the pity of the actual, and that twofold vision makes humility.





VII  
LOVE AND THE FITNESS OF  
THINGS



## VII

### LOVE AND THE FITNESS OF THINGS

1 COR. xiii. 5.

‘*LOVE . . . doth not behave itself unseemly.*’ One might think for a moment that the apostle in these words is handling his great theme with a lighter and more superficial touch. Many of the ideas that commonly gather round the word ‘seemliness’ are such as might lead one to suppose that the writer here in his phrase concerning love’s seemly behaviour is straying from the essentials. Seemliness suggests the ideas of tact and delicacy, judgement and propriety. It stands in the minds of many not so much for right itself as for a way of being right and doing right. It relates to shape rather than to substance. It is the

pattern and not the fabric. It is, if you like, the etiquette of the Christian life, useful and desirable but not essential. But just as in daily fellowship there is an unwritten etiquette that is part of the sacrament of unselfishness, so there is a seemliness of outward life that is born of the highest and the holiest things. Life has its higher properties. There is an eternal fitness for things. There is a seemliness that is own brother to righteousness and mercy. That is the seemliness of love.

Let us then for a moment try to seize upon the thought that lies at the very core of this word about love's seemly ways. It is this. Love is in the eternal fitness of things. It has an instinctive power of self-adjustment to every situation. But remember, it is the highest and the holiest adjustment. Love is in the fitness of things not because it adapts itself to the situation, but because it has in its own heart, and is in living union with, all that can make the situation just what it ought to be. There is a seemliness that is secured by a tactful but immoral

acceptance of things as we find them. 'When you are in Rome you must do as Rome does.' Follow that dictum, and you will achieve some degree of seemliness—in Rome. Seemliness in this weak and convenient interpretation of the word is a cloak for half the sin of the world. The thing that is seemly is the thing that is right. That is the philosophy of the easy-going and the self-indulgent and the morally timorous ones. But love says, The thing that is right is the thing that is seemly. And thus the claim of love to be in the fitness of things is not always manifest at the moment, but it is always justified in the end. It is not the accommodating but the unyielding propriety of life.

But when you have safeguarded the idea of seemliness by interpreting it in the terms of the perfect good, you may find in it a wealth of tender beauty, and you may read in it larger and deeper obligations resting upon the soul day by day.

Let us see how, in the strong grip of Christian thought, the idea of seemliness, so weak and wavering, so colourless and plastic,

becomes invested with clear and lofty and positive meaning. '*Love . . . doth not behave itself unseemly.*' There is a wondrous subtlety of feeling and delicacy of touch with love. It seeks the best in the best way. Perhaps the means and the end are more implicit in each other than we often conceive them to be. A man's ideal is his guide as well as his goal. It not only towers above him, it sends the glint of its light down on to the path of his feet. The better his view of the goal, the truer and worthier will be the path he takes to reach it. It does not do to separate between the fashion of life and the spirit of it, and to say of a man who continually does ill that he means well. Love never makes a mistake. Love never blunders in its treatment of others. Love is never tactless. It is the incompleteness of our love to God and man, it is the partial nature of the divine indwelling, that admits of these things in the daily fellowship. There is a kind of tact which, if a man possess it, shall smooth and simplify his daily communion with men, but the absence of which shall not imperil his

immortal soul. A man may be a good Christian and a poor courtier. But some folk make too much of that fact. They seem to reverse the argument and say that the less a man's courtesy the greater his Christianity. Brusquerie passes for honesty. Sometimes a man delivers his soul, and so doing bruises his brother's soul, or brings it into the bondage of a bitter memory. In the measure that life lacks love it lacks light, not only on the question of what life at its best is, but also on the continuous problem of how life is to be lived. There is much unseemliness in life that can scarcely in itself be indicted as an offence against the moral law, but which stands for something other than the best. So often we do good badly. We blunder and stumble along in the right direction. We practise one virtue at the expense of another. Our honesty flouts our charity. Our candour outstrips our sympathy. Our earnestness threatens our patience. And out of all such happenings there comes into our life the unseemly thing.

Unseemliness is often the result of a want of balance in our inner life. We need some-

thing to co-ordinate for us all the forms of good and all the forces of right. And only love is equal to that task. Love is perfect good in perfect touch with life. It is the deep secret of the eternal best not only enlightening a man's mind but controlling his action. We sometimes think that winsomeness is an accident of temperament. In its most shallow and least valuable forms perhaps it is. But love that is man's true life develops within him and confers upon him powers of insight and feeling, and sure, unformulated instincts, that teach him to utter the truth wisely and to do good in the best way. Thus love and seemliness are inseparable things. Love is a courtier even with its enemies. Love is a brother even on the battlefield. Love is a servant even on the throne.

And if all this be so, we cannot afford to look with comparative complacence or indifference upon these errors of judgement or conduct that so often are associated with our endeavours after the service of God and our brother. Love has no unloveliness. And since there are so many unlovely things in the



fashion of our daily service, we can but judge that we know not love yet as we should know it, that we love not yet as we ought to love. Though it is true that love is first of all and always in the eternal fitness of things, that it is in perfect harmony with all the wide, pure laws of the Divinity men worship and the sanctity they seek, it is equally true that love must have a peculiar fitness to deal successfully and graciously with all the difficult and complicated and persistently imperfect conditions of life and work that obtain in the world. It must be able to bear itself fitly and seemly day by day.

There is a spiritual dignity—one might almost add, and a spiritual decorum—that is part of the manifestation of them that walk in love. It is not a matter for self-satisfaction, much less is it a matter for boasting, that, having right principles in our lives, we leave those principles to express themselves as they will. There are doubtless many ways of seeking the right and of doing it. But for each of us each hour there is but one best way ; and it is because, whilst holding to the

principle, we so often miss the best way of obeying it, that our lives are so often ungracious and even ineffectual. All is not harmony in the communion of saints. That is because the saints are imperfect, we say. But how great a measure of that imperfection is covered by the word unseemliness ! Crass selfishness and blind pride do not possess a monopoly of the things that deal pain and hurt in men's lives. There is so much awkward piety, so much blundering goodwill, so much unattractive sanctity, so much unlovely religion. And they whose lives are on this wise need to be looking more deeply into their own hearts. For fault in the fashion of life springs from fault in the spirit of it. At the heart of true religion there is love—love that doth not behave itself unseemly ; and if we lack that which is most meet in facing any of life's simple occasions, it is because there is some part of love's fair secret not yet revealed unto us.

VIII  
LOVE AND THE UNLOVELY



## VIII

### LOVE AND THE UNLOVELY

1 COR. xiii. 5.

HERE we find Love brought face to face with some of the great and yet common and inevitable tests of life. Life for every man is a quest. And there are two things that decide for every man the true meaning and worth of this quest to him. He may not be interested in the decision. He may not know anything about it. He may hold views that contradict it. But the judgement of the two things is automatic, unerring, and final. And the things are these—the object of the quest, and the motive of it. It is probably true that we can never safely separate these two things in our thinking and our reckoning. ‘*Love seeketh not its*

*own.*' That rules out of Love's life a great many unworthy objects of endeavour. If love is not a self-seeker, then we know that love cannot be a libertine, nor a mere gatherer of material gains and of personally pleasurable experiences. The unselfish life must of necessity maintain an attitude towards the world that renders it immune from much of the world's disease. But the unselfishness of love has a higher aim and issue than that. It secures a larger and truer safety of soul. There are so many things good and pure in themselves, but which become of real worth to those who seek and find them, and to the world in which they are sought and found, according to the unselfishness of the seeker. A rake *must* be selfish, but a scholar *may* be. The idler who will not earn his bread must be selfish, but the hardest and most patient worker may be. The men who lounge and dally in the valley of sensual pleasures, of physical and mental ease, of moral indifference, must be selfish; but a man may set his face steadfastly to the heights, and toil upwards, taking his selfishness with him.

Among our books, amid unflinching fidelities of daily work, yea, even in our religion, we may be selfish. '*Love seeketh not its own.*' Love never for a moment has itself as its guiding interest. Its learning is for the light of others, its toil is for the good of others, its prayer and faith and sacrifice are for the cleansing and the comforting of others.

One might show the value of this selfless outlook in many ways. Love seeketh not its own gain, its own good, its own success, its own peace. But the Apostle gives us full illustration of how this unselfish way of life works out in the words that follow. '*Love . . . is not embittered, taketh not account of evil ; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness.*' The teaching of these phrases might be gathered up under the title, 'Love and wrong.' Here are three things said about love's attitude toward the wrong and sin of the world. In its inmost heart it keeps its sweetness and its patient temper ; for the wrongs it suffers it has a short memory ; and in the presence of all wrong things, whether

or not they directly affect its own life, it has the grace of sorrow.

*'Love is not embittered.'* No man goes through life without having some wrongs done to him. Life is full of small injustices and minor cruelties. It is blotted every now and again by some great outstanding wrong. Love knows how to be indignant, how to respond with a fine pure anger to the call of some outraged principle of goodness and truth. But love is not disturbed or soured by the ill things directed against itself. Indignation is a very common thing, but righteous indignation is something rarer than some might suppose. The term is more common than the quality. So often a man is roused to a great pitch of unrest and resentment by some wrong thing, not because it is in itself wrong, but because the doing of it has involved him in inconvenience or suffering. And such resentment, no matter how it may be expressed, is not likely to have the best results. We must learn to face the wrongs of life in the right temper. We must keep in our hearts



all that is tender and patient and self-schooled, even in the presence of those things that call forth our just indignation. We must be large and lofty and fundamental in our anger. We must resent the evil thing, not merely some fragment of evil consequence that has reached our own interests or threatened our personal comfort and peace. It is hard to fight the wrong of the world at all; but who shall measure the difficulty of fighting it and keeping every bit of personal vengeance, every shadow of reprisal, out of the fight? *Love*, in the thick of the fight, with drawn sword and tightened lips, *is not provoked*. Love is the perfect warrior. Love is the flawless champion of right.

*'Love . . . taketh not account of evil.'* Love's sweet spirit in the presence of personal injuries, and the disabilities resulting from the wrong-doing of others, is accounted for by the place that such wrongs have in its thoughts. They have no place at all. They are never entered in the day-book of a passing regard or the ledger of a longer memory. We are not wholly masters of our thoughts,

but we have more to do than we imagine with the fashioning of our memory. I do not mean the number of things we remember, nor the length of time we can remember them ; but the *kind* of things we remember. There is a morality of memory. A good memory is manifest quite as clearly in the things a man is able to forget as in the things he is able to remember. As is a man's character, so is his memory. One man forgets the wrong he does. That is the token of a sleepy conscience. Another forgets the wrong done to him. That is the token of a large heart. Love's memory is so fashioned that the helpful and the worthy things linger in it and the bitter and unjust things fade from it. Love keeps a list of its creditors, but none of its debtors. How could it be otherwise with that which seeketh not its own ?

We must be careful, however, to set right limits to the forgetfulness of love. There is evil whereof a man must take account. There are a thousand wrongs he must reckon with. There are injustices and oppressions,

flaunting follies and creeping shames. Every wrong is a wrong against love; and love takes account of it and resents it and makes war upon it. Love has eyes of flame and a hand that can smite. It casts from its memory the burden of its own wrongs that it may the better bear in mind its brother's wrongs. Its anger is pure and selfless. Love's watchful eyes see the evil thing hurting and thwarting the life of a fair world. Of that vision it can never be unmindful. It is only in the matter of the personal affront that it is so nobly blind.

And now let us look at the third aspect of the relation of love to wrong. As the sweet patience of love in the endurance of personal injuries ('*Love is not embittered*') is related to the place that such things have in love's thoughts ('*Love taketh not account of evil*'), so this in turn is related to love's inward attitude towards all wrong ('*Love rejoiceth not in unrighteousness*'). This might seem at first sight to be poor praise wherewith to crown the head of love. But joy is one of life's deep things. It is one of the fathomless

spontaneities of life. It is the soul's just response to the rhythm of righteousness. It is as deep as the soul. Evil, then, does not touch the heart of love. The natural, instinctive, spontaneous life of love is an instrument far too wonderful for the deft but stained fingers of the world to play upon. And it is because love responds only to the good and the true that it can fashion a memory incapable of treasuring personal injuries, and can bear through life a spirit that nothing can embitter.

IX  
THE OPTIMISM OF LOVE



## IX

### THE OPTIMISM OF LOVE

1 COR. xiii. 6, 7.

THE central thought round which this next group of phrases may be gathered, and in the light of which they may be interpreted, is the optimism of love. It were well, maybe, for us to tarry awhile and consider this word and the meaning of it. It needs to be disentangled from some mistaken ideas that have become more or less closely associated with it, or that have even claimed to be the thing itself. There is an optimism, so called, that is secured at the expense of a broad and just view of things as they are. It is the product of uncatholicity of thought and sympathy. It is arbitrary and selective. It is roughly described in the familiar phrase 'looking at the bright side of things.' If a

man looks at the bright side of everything, if he has discovered that everything has a bright side, if for him the light of hope does not lie here and there in patches upon the face of the world, but is rather shining everywhere, if for him the seeming darkness is really a mistake in his angle of vision, then we can scarcely deny him the title of optimist. But to look at the bright side where there is one, and, with cheerful determination, to refuse to look upon the dark things, the all-dark things, at all, is not optimism. For the true optimist nothing is quite dark.

And closely allied to the optimism that lacks breadth is the optimism that lacks depth. It is content with appearances. It satisfies its eyes with the fair forms and fashions of things. It is superficial. It asks no questions. It probes no depths. It never knows one fundamental moment. It skims the surface of life, and adds to the error of unjust and arbitrary selection the error of a too easy acceptance of each and every thing that has any appearance of beauty and of good.



And there is one grave charge that these and all kindred views of life are open to—they are essentially self-regarding. A man may decide to ‘look on the bright side,’ but that means that he has decided not to see something that he ought to see. He must turn away his face from the sorrows and shames and failures of his brethren. His happiness is gained at the price of his helpfulness. He cannot and dare not look at the head bowed with grief and the face paled with disaster. He must turn aside from all grey, lonely, broken lives. Only thus can he keep the almost worthless treasure of his blind cheerfulness. And in the hour when he cannot turn aside, the hour when the grey, bowed figure is himself, his so-called optimism goes out like a rushlight in a storm.

Another charge to be brought against the cheerfulness that comes of the narrow and superficial view of life is this: it is too much the outcome of perpetual effort. It lacks spontaneity. It is not inevitable. It has to be gathered and guarded. It peers about anxiously for every glimpse of bright-

ness and walks amid a hundred broken lights. And between such persistent, eclectic, selfish cheerfulness and the true optimism there is as great a difference as lies between the flicker of a torchlight procession and the steady light of the risen sun. The true optimism is broad and deep. It has a wide and catholic outlook. It is not first of all concerned with certain aspects of things or kinds of things. There is nothing selective in its gaze out upon the world. It sees things as they are. True, you cannot have at the same time complete breadth and perfect definition. Your eye cannot deal with the horizon as it deals with the flower at your feet. You can count the petals of a daisy, but the hills twenty miles away reveal to you only mass and outline. Sometimes you can scarcely distinguish them from the low sunset clouds into which they seem to melt. Optimism knows full well that far shadowy vision where heaven and earth seem to meet, and where a man cannot say whether that which he sees is the high mountain-line of an aspiring earth or the mantle-rim of a stooping heaven.

But there is no particle of vagueness in essential optimism. It says behind the universe there is a reason, and it is a good reason ; behind this world of men and things there is a power, and it is a good power. It claims the best things as the things nearest to the normal, most significant of what is meant to be and of what some day most surely shall be. And the basis of such vision and reasoning is love.

Let us go back for a moment to the point in the hymn we last considered. We had got as far as these words : ‘ *Love . . . rejoiceth not in unrighteousness.* ’ We saw that joy is a deep thing of the spirit, and that therefore in the depths of the life of love there is no communion with, and no response to, evil. We come now to the positive putting of the same thing—*but rejoiceth with the truth.* The interpretation follows naturally. It is this. Love is the brother of light. Love owns conscious kinship with all good. The expression here used, *the truth*, must be rendered as widely and deeply as possible. The word St. Paul used has a

strong moral significance. It means the truth as identified at once with beauty and goodness. Love is in touch with the holy purpose of God the Creator and Father of men. It finds that purpose everywhere. It knows many a place where that purpose is thwarted, but not one whence it is banished. Love is in tune with the Infinite, and feels in all this strange and oft-times dark struggle the glorious throb of truth eternal seeking to be manifest and free.

Now there is a world of difference between this optimism and that more or less superficial cheerfulness that so often passes for it among men. Instead of endeavouring to limit its vision, it is ever seeking to widen it. It lives not by the exclusive, but by the illimitable. There is nothing that it fears to see or wishes to avoid. It has had a glimpse of the vast secret of all this mystery of life. It has learned that it is a beautiful and a holy secret. Yea, it is God Himself.

It is perhaps necessary, especially in view of the fact that a very misleading use has lately been made of the doctrine of the

Divine Immanence, to define as clearly as possible the relation of all-bearing, all-believing, all-hoping, all-enduring love to the fact of sin. How does love keep cheerful in the face of the vision of sin? The answer briefly is that love does not keep cheerful in the presence of that vision. Cheerfulness is but a very small part of the higher optimism in any case. Love grieves and weeps over the sinfulness of the world. Love that beholds things as they are knows an agony in that vision. Love does not call sin a perverted holiness. Sin is in love's eyes the radical opposite of holiness. But through all its grieving and its weeping, love never for a moment forfeits its right to be called an optimist. And for this reason: It is at one with the deepest truth of things. It knows that God is all in all, and God is good. Therefore all the original and positive forces of life are good also, as is the divinely purposed fashion and destiny of the creation. Evil, judged by God's purpose, is wholly negative. Judged by man's true nature in that purpose, it is unnatural. That it should

finally have dominion over the divine creation is unthinkable. That it should outlive the good is impossible. And love rejoiceth in the truth—the truth that is manifest in all that is righteous and holy and is hidden in the deep places of the creation. To behold goodness as the rightful dweller in the earth and evil as the lawless intruder; to know that no man comes to himself until he comes to God; and, best of all, to see in Jesus Christ, and through Him, the life that man was made to live and shall live—this is to have in one's soul an optimism stronger than the strongest sorrows and shames of mortal years.

X

THE OPTIMISM OF LOVE  
—(*continued*)





## X

### THE OPTIMISM OF LOVE—(*continued*)

1 COR. xiii. 6, 7.

WE have looked at some general considerations relating to optimism. Let us now see how love makes good its claim to this virtue. The story of love's optimism as it unfolds itself is this: '*Love . . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*'

Let us look at this story. '*Love . . . beareth all things.*' Some have read '*covereth,*' to avoid what seems to them to be a needless repetition, for the word '*endureth*' follows at the end of the verse. Love is thus set forth as busy making excuses for the wrong-doer, and veiling as far as may be the seamy side of life. But surely this is not the worthiest view

we can take of the work of love. The actual word that St. Paul used admits of such an interpretation, but one feels that 'beareth' should be read rather than 'covereth,' not merely because it is nearer the original meaning of the verb used, but because it is so much more congruous with all else that the Apostle says about love.

'*Love . . . beareth all things.*' Love is not afraid to face life. It does not hesitate to stoop under the whole weight of life, all pity and wrong, all folly and pain. It cannot be crushed beneath the burden. It has vast powers of self-recovery. It has boundless spiritual elasticity. In the words of an old poem, 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.'

There is both a passive and an active meaning in the word 'beareth.' Love is capable of wonderful submission. Its acceptance of life is quiet and catholic. No matter how great the burden of responsibility or of difficulty, love accepts it without protest. It faces the slights and blind scorns and misunderstandings, the resentments and male-

volent oppositions, without comment. It is strong in its silences. But love is not in this world as clay in the hands of the potter. Its acceptance of life does not always mean its acquiescence in the thing accepted. As long as there is an unlovely thing in life there will be a protest in the heart of love. Love is the spirit brooding over all the possibility of good in life that is now without form and void. Love stands for the grace and peace beyond the ill manners and ungoverned passions and unrestrained wrongs of a world that is yet in the making. Love would protest if it were any use protesting. Love would stand resentful and aloof if thereby the world might be taught to win the heavenly victory. But love knows that there is but one way to the highest and holiest service of mankind. It is the way of the Christ, who accepted life that He might lift it, whose passing through the world exemplified the silence of the true idealist, who knew that the thing that goes most deeply into the heart of the world is the unuttered protest of perfect fidelity to truth and complete unselfishness.

Perhaps it is only on Calvary that we can find the last meaning of these calm, patient words about love bearing all things.

‘*Believeth all things.*’ Love is not credulous. It is not ready to deceive itself or to be deceived by others. It does not indulge in the easy optimism of cheap delusions. One swallow does not make summer for love. But love knows the summer is coming. It feels the stirring of a new life in a thousand seeming lifeless things. It is not nearly enough to say that love has a general determination to put upon all things the best construction possible. Love does that; but its construction is the best because it is the truest. It does not merely invest life with the bright garment of a kindly judgement. It looks with its clear, wise eyes *into* things, and sees the brightness glowing and shining at the very heart of them. The glad confidence of love is born of the divinity of life. Love cannot believe anything too high about human life, for it cometh from above. Love looks out upon humanity as one looks upon some youth who, maybe, is not doing very well, but who has behind him the

traditions of a godly home, and about him the prayers of two who know the friendship of the Lord, and within him the indestructible good instincts that are fostered and developed in the heaven-sweet atmosphere of reverence for all right things. That youth is humanity, whose home is in the heart of the Father, who hath made men in love, humanity with so many Godward instincts slumbering in its soul, and with the Infinite Pity yearning over it day by day and age after age. Love is not surprised at any sweet and gracious thing that manifests itself in human character. Love was expecting it. It knew all the time that it was there, and would find its way into the light.

And again, the construction love puts upon life, and the faith love has in life, are real and splendid factors in the world's betterment. We rise to the demands that are made upon us. There is a tendency in all life to adjust itself to the judgement passed upon it. There is such a thing as salvation by the faith of others. It is no small thing to help a man to favour his own chances in the fight where

the prize is character. Through the tired ranks of the vanquished, through the throngs of the disheartened, across the trampled field of life strewn with wasted efforts and battered dreams, love passes, still believing all things. And in the light of that brave faith many a man stretches out his hand for his sword and finds it worth gripping, even though it be a broken one.

‘*Love . . . hopeth all things.*’ We have seen that love looks out upon life with unflinching gaze. It does not need to reject or juggle with the evidence of its senses. It does not try to persuade itself that the thief is honest, or the libertine chaste, or the worldling heavenly-minded. But it grapples to its soul the fact that every man was made for honesty and purity and the heavenly vision. Where it cannot find room for its faith amid the narrow and sad realities of the hour, love slips its hand into the hand of hope and carries its faith onward into the ampler air of good and holy possibility. It is not that hope takes up the tale where faith sits stricken and speechless. Faith and hope are so interwoven

that they can hardly be treated as two separate things. In love's soul there is a faith in human life as God made it that demands a larger space than the present and a wider outlook than the outlook of the hour. So hope comes to faith's assistance, and with one on either hand love passes onward to the place where the largest and loftiest creed has room to breathe. There is, as we saw in our previous meditation, an optimism that comes, in part, of the long view, and that finds its gospel written on the horizon. It is this that carries love in joyous triumph over the darkest and most shameful facts in the human story. Love does not deny them; but it does assert they are not all. For the race, for the nation, for the Church, for the single life, love claims the future; and amid the innumerable failures and defeats and shames of these mortal years, it stands the bright undaunted prophet of some better thing.

And now we need but a word to complete the picture of love the optimist, and it is this—*'endureth all things.'* This word *'endureth'*

means to hold on under a burden. The optimism of love is a strong and stable thing. Love cannot only stoop beneath the burden of life and lift it ; it can carry that burden up to the very throne of God. Love cannot merely recognize the divinity of life ; it can keep that vision fresh and clear through all that would obscure it. Love cannot only rise with one strong flight of hope and see the failing and struggling souls of men recovering themselves and winning the victory ; it can keep that recovery and victory always in sight, to gladden all who fight and to hearten all who fail.



## XI

# LOVE THE GOAL OF LIFE



## XI

### LOVE THE GOAL OF LIFE

1 Cor. xiii. 8-10.

THE Apostle has been bringing love very near to us. We have seen it looking with calm and pitying eyes upon the fret and fault of our little world. We have seen it passing through life, bearing up under its whole burden, believing all things, hoping all things, and not wearying in that faith and hope. And now there comes a word that folds us in the mystery of love's nature, and yet explains to us, as nothing else could explain it, the secret of love's power. '*Love never faileth.*' 'Never' is a long word. It cannot be written in all the years. This is not a vision of love keeping heart and doing good through life's

long day and unto the nightfall. Here love has passed the nightfall and is living in the morning land. These last words about love carry it home to its dwelling-place in the eternity of God. Thence love comes and thither love returns. Now eternity as an abstract idea can in the nature of things mean but little to our minds. It is not so much an idea as an instinct. We have that within us that pines and frets if it have not eternity to feed upon. And the one thing in life that is the full and daily pledge of the eternal is love. We have seen love meeting the demands of time. Only the eternal can do that. Love can grapple with the years because it is not of the years. We must not think of eternity as infinite duration. That is at once the most bewildering and least profitable conception of it.

It dwells not in innumerable years,  
It is the breath of God in timeless things,  
The strong divine persistence that inheres  
In love's red pulses and in faith's white wings.

All true life is eternal life. Eternity is a quality of things. It is involved in the

essential nature of all that is real, good, beautiful, and true. Every one of these words applies to love. And herein lies the eternity of love. Love stands for, and gathers into its heart, all life's everlasting treasure and meaning. It is not the *immortelle* among the flowers in life's garden. It is the timeless life within the flowers, of which they are in their nature and degree some expression. It is that for which all things exist. It is at once the source and the goal of life. The Apostle calls it *that which is perfect*, and it is in the light of that description of it that we must read this passage. '*Whether there be prophecies they shall be done away, whether there be tongues they shall cease, whether there be knowledge it shall be done away.*' Love is not contrasted with these other forms of human activity and power. We must not for one moment look on love as separate from the gifts that grace and enrich the true life of the world. Love is greater than these things, not because it eclipses them, but because it includes them. The early spring and the height of summer

are not two things but one. There are many things we saw in the spring that we cannot find in the richer growths of the riper years. Some of those things were not meant to endure. They served a passing need. But they were a real link between life in its beginning and life in its fulfilment. If you watch the growth of a sycamore from a tiny sapling you find its earliest leaves, that come in pairs, are quite unlike the typical sycamore leaf ; and that, as each pair fulfils its ministry of protection and nourishment and falls off, the pair that succeeds it is more like the typical leaf. Thus nature works patiently towards '*that which is perfect.*' And thus God fashions and fulfils all life. We see things serving their purpose for a day or a decade or a generation, taking their real and essential share in the progress of the world, and then being done away, not by a definite decision or conscious choice on the part of those who have ceased to rely on them or to need them, but simply in the natural order of the advance they themselves have helped to bring about. And it is in

this sense that St. Paul speaks of the passing of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge.

In the church at Corinth there was a strange spiritual phenomenon. It was some form of ecstatic speech or song which few, or perhaps no one, beside the person so affected, could understand, and which was not always understood by the subject of the inspiration. Almost every period of the Church's history, and certainly all the great historic revivals of religion, have been marked by strange experiences comparable in nature, if not in form, with the 'tongues' at Corinth. Now the people to whom such experiences came were often not a little proud of them. The Apostle desired to correct their spiritual estimate and perspective in this matter. So he showed them how that these experiences of theirs were not things to be boasted of or to live for. They were merely phases in the development of religion, signs of life, perhaps, but signs also of immaturity. They existed not as ends but as means. They were not the goal, but merely steps to be taken and for-

gotten. Yea, said he, and not only is this strange gift of tongues a merely transient element in your religious life, but even things which have a much more obvious claim to usefulness and worth, 'prophecies and knowledge,' fragmentary revelations, brief glimpses into mysteries, shall have their day and cease to be.

The word concerning the passing away of knowledge has perplexed many. Some of that perplexity disappears when you remember that the phrase 'done away' does not mean extermination but inclusion in some higher thing. Probably some of the Mystics have said the truest word about doing away of knowledge. But if we turn to our own experience we can find some light. For us sometimes love and knowledge are one. There is an understanding of life's deep things which we do not objectively acquire, but which is rather a mode of our affectional nature. Maybe all knowledge will some day cease to be a separate and self-conscious acquisition, and will be an essential mode of the life of love. Thus



for the seeker after wisdom, love is the true goal of life. Love is the eternal in life. Love alone can claim permanence in religion and in human history. Love alone never faileth, is never superseded, never outgrown.

Aye, and when prophecy her tale hath finished,  
Knowledge hath withered from the trembling tongue,  
Love shall survive and love be undiminished,  
Love be imperishable, love be young.

Perhaps it is necessary to point out that the view of spiritual gifts the Corinthians took is the view men have ever been prone to take of them. One of the things that has perpetuated itself in the human story is the tendency to mistake the temporary for the abiding, and to confuse between the forms in which the religious spirit has embodied itself and that ideal character which the religious spirit is meant to produce. Witness the constant plea on the part of some for vanished or vanishing forms of experience. Some would have the Church life of to-day a replica of fifty years ago. They yearn for the 'good old days.' But so

doing they miss the true philosophy of spiritual history. And what is more serious, they do injustice to the law of love and the work of love in human hearts. There is only one thing that is meant to persist, only one thing that has the power to keep its own nature and shape amid all that is outworn, and that thing is love manifested in character. The one thing towards which everything else is but a more or less temporary contributor, the true standard and the eternal goal of life, is love. Age after age love carries on its work on higher planes and in more spiritual forms. It adapts itself continuously to the whole advance of life; therefore the thing about which we need to be concerned is not the form that spiritual experience is taking to-day, either among our brethren or in our own hearts. Our concern must be that that experience issues ever in the building of that pure and holy character that is, as we have seen, the character of love, and is therefore God's ideal for human life.

## XII

# LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE



## XII

### LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE

1 COR. xiii. 9-12.

*‘FOR we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect shall come, that which is in part shall be done away.’* Thus St. Paul at once explains and justifies the passing of things that have served their purpose. He does not make any reference to tongues. Their ecstatic character shows they were not meant to endure. As Godet puts it in a fine comment on this verse, ‘When we live in God, we are in Him without going out of ourselves.’ We have already seen that this phrase ‘done away’ means a natural and gradual absorption into a stronger and more united and effective life. If we have any doubt as to this interpretation,

the Apostle makes his meaning perfectly clear by introducing the simple and dignified figure of physical growth: '*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things.*' Perhaps no other figure could have so well set forth this aspect of the work of love in human life. Love is the secret of growth. As we leave childhood and youth behind us, many things pass out of our lives, but life is in no case poorer for their passing. Life is ever growing stronger and steadier, more completely unified in the control of the brain, more completely available for the ends for which it should be lived. Such is the work of love in the life of the soul. It alone can bring us to life's true stature and to the fullness of its powers. By the grace of love we are to outgrow the puerilities and follies of human nature, we are to come into vital touch with all the currents that flow through human life, we are to attain to the vigorous endurance of spiritual maturity and to the large and catholic knowledge and sympathy of 'the life that is life indeed.' And

here, for many reasons, one would fain leave the Hymn. There is so much in the few concluding sentences that defies exposition ; so much that eludes the mind but makes its home in the heart. A man who finds many a thing to say as he climbs the hill may be silenced by the view from the summit. The great thing to which St. Paul has been bringing us is this, that love is one with life's last high knowledge of God. It is a comparatively easy thing to follow love through the thick of the world, to watch love's way of meeting life and dealing with it under conditions which are not wholly strange to any one of us. But we come now to that in the life of love that carries us beyond the voices of the marketplace and the shadows of the world. The fulfilment of love is the knowledge of God.

*' Now we see in a mirror, darkly ; but then face to face : now I know in part ; but then shall I know even as also I have been known.'* What is it that we see in such dim vision and know with such partial knowledge ? It is the face of our heavenly Father ; it is the heart of God. *' We see in a mirror,'* says St. Paul.

It is helpful to remember that he was writing for people who lived in a city famous for its mirrors. They were of polished metal, and their reflecting power was poor compared with a modern looking-glass. Now we see in a mirror. We only get a reflected image of truth. We cannot look right into the face of truth itself. One need not stay to argue that this is indeed a true description of our present view of God. We spend a day among the hills, and in the evening we say, 'I have seen God this day.' And it is true. But we saw Him dimly reflected in the mirror of the mountains. We caught glimpses of something all-powerful and everlasting. We knew there was more to see. Nature is at once a vision and a veil. It hides more than it reveals, and he comes nearest to the truth folded in all the fair forms of things who amid their beauty is most haunted by a sense of the unrevealed. If we turn from Nature to history, the same experience awaits us. The story of humanity is a story of heavenly purposes and powers continually obscured and thwarted by earthly passions and shames.



The mirror of revelation gives better results, but here as elsewhere we see only a reflected light. It comes to us through the medium of lives like our own. Prophet and apostle had precious gifts of insight and outlook, but some of the shadows that fall upon us fell upon them. And even the Christ who is the Truth has not drawn completely aside the veil upon the face of life. All the great mysteries of freedom and responsibility and destiny meet in Him, and concerning them His word unto us is still: 'I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.' So it comes to this: whether we look for God in the wondrous earth, or in the more wondrous human story, or in the sacred Book, or in One who gathers up the deepest meanings of all these things into Himself, day by day longings arise in our hearts to know as we do not know and to see as we cannot see.

The broken light that falls across these mortal years does not satisfy us. There is still that within us that tells us it is broken, and we cannot but believe, even when we

cannot set in array our reasons for believing it, that in the good pleasure of God we shall some day find a path of knowledge less tortuous than that we now tread—a simpler path and better lighted. St. Paul voices this faith of ours in a clearer vision thus : We shall see face to face and know as we have been known. Perhaps St. John can help us to interpret this word about seeing face to face. God is love. Love is not one among many attributes of God. It is God Himself. Love is not His disposition ; it is His being.

Now, with this conception of God we can see that a blurred vision of Him and a sadly imperfect knowledge of Him are ours in the measure that we fail to share His nature ; that is to say, in the measure that we are without love. The pledge and the medium of our knowledge of God is our power to love. In another place St. John puts this for us in very striking language. Speaking of the law of love, he says : ‘ Which thing is true in Him and in you.’ There is that in man which is also in God. There is, therefore, at least the promise that man may come to know

God immediately and intuitively through that in his own spiritual being which is common to him and his Maker. The Christian may look forward to a day when the soul shall be purged from everything that is not love, everything that now renders him dependent upon reflected light, and shall see God without the aid of any of those intermediate ministries which are like a veil hung before weak eyes, transmitting light and yet withholding it.

It is not easy to put into words what one may feel to be true concerning the terms of knowledge in another world, for the 'now' and 'then' of this passage are in two different worlds. But life here and hereafter is one; and there comes to us even now a knowledge of God, a light for our lives, not through the dust-dimmed windows of the mind, not broken up and refracted by the dull, earth-stained prism of our reason, but falling directly and simply through the open doorway of a loving and responsive heart. It is not so much instruction as inspiration. It does not enable us to discuss God, but it helps us to know Him. It may leave us

dumb in a debate, but it makes us sure in the great fight. Even now we know God as we cannot tell any one we know Him. And that knowledge is not something we possess ; it is something we are. It comes to us, not along the stream of our ideas, but along the stream of our vital experience. It is a moral and affectional illumination wherein He from whom we come is more clearly seen of us than anywhere else. And it is the pledge in our own hearts to the truth of the Apostle's words, that we shall see our Father face to face and know Him with a knowledge comparable in kind to that wherewith He knows us.

XIII

THE ETERNITY OF LOVE



## XIII

### THE ETERNITY OF LOVE

1 COR. xiii. 13.

NOW we come to the last great words of this great Hymn to Love. ‘*But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three ; and the greatest of these is love.*’ Why shall faith and hope abide for ever ? We have seen and felt that love must be eternal ; but how come faith and hope to have a place in ‘ the life everlasting ’ ? What is the secret of this persistence ? The answer is found in a true view of the continuity of life. Life here and life hereafter will not be two entirely different things. Death is not the prodigious miracle that some suppose it to be. It is not a magician, and the arrow in its hand is not a wand that suddenly banishes all that is,

and calls into existence a dream-world compact of beautiful impossibilities. Death is a perfectly simple, law-abiding event in life. All the real meaning of life will pass through the shadow of death. Death is an event in an eternal process. We must not take too static a view of life after death. We must not confuse between the eternal and the final. We cannot but believe that death has a more than physical significance, and that it will put an end to some of the conditions in which at present our development has to be carried on. We shall not hereafter pay the bitter price of suffering for our soul's abiding gains. We shall not be enlightened by disillusionment. We shall not find the thing to be trusted through the failure of that which seems true, nor find our way to life's ultimate confidence by a path strewn with broken faiths. We cannot but believe that what one may call the dark and negative side of our soul's progress towards the perfect knowledge of God will be done away. But surely life will always mean growth. To reach finality would be to fall short of eternity. And the terms of that



eternal advance are written clearly in our souls to-day. If we believe that hereafter and for ever we shall have a personal existence, then we shall for ever be finite beings in the presence of the Infinite Being. For evermore He will be unfolding Himself to us and bringing us to an ever deeper and greater life in Him. Therefore the vital conditions of our relationship to God must abide, and they are faith and hope and love. We talk about faith being lost in sight and hope passing into realization; but we must never forget that so speaking we are describing not sudden and complete events, but one eternal experience. For all eternity the finite will be leaning upon and longing after the Infinite. We cannot imagine a point when there will be no ministry of the unseen to challenge our faith and to quicken our hope. Here faith has a battle to fight and hope makes the heart ache. They are the price of these things in a world where no good thing is obtained without cost or kept without challenge. But if this world were other than it is, if no difficulties stood in the path of goodness

and no clouds veiled the heavens, faith and hope would lose none of their real meaning and use. They will not cease to live when they no longer have to fight for their life. They are not mere adjuncts of human life. They are the fundamental terms of our personal existence and the eternal conditions of our relationship with God, and they must abide so long as God and the soul abide.

But of these three things that abide for ever the greatest is love. Wherein lies the surpassing greatness of love? Obviously it is not a matter of duration; for faith and hope, as the eternal conditions of the life of love and the knowledge of God, must live as long as love lives.

Does not the question of Love's supreme greatness find its answer in this way? Faith and hope are means to an end. Love is the end itself. Faith and hope are the eternal ties uniting us in our ever-expanding life to the infinite life of God; but love is that life itself in us. Love is the very life of God shared with us. Faith and hope are ever passing into, being changed into, vision and

possession. Their life is an eternal transition and transformation. But love knows no change. Love is final and absolute. God, the all-knowing, does not believe. God, the all-possessing, does not hope. God loves. God is love. Therefore, though for us in our eternal relationship to Him abide faith, hope, and love—the greatest of these is love.

With regard to the supreme meaning and worth of love here in the midst of the years, here in the thick of the world, perhaps one can find little to say beyond what one has already tried to say. Let it suffice us to remind ourselves that the last words of this great Hymn to Love are not a new claim brought forward in the interest of love. '*The greatest . . . is love.*' That is just a statement of the Apostle's central theme. That is the plea of the poem. It might have been introduced at the beginning. But the writer, with a wisdom that abundantly and superbly justifies itself, left the title till the end. Here it stands, simple, indefeasible, final. It is as the voice of one standing on the borderland betwixt two worlds and pro-

claiming the last high truth concerning that life that belongs to them both. Whether we look out upon the world of human joys and sorrows, where so many claims are urged, so many things are pleading their own merits, so many things await our choice and our judgement, or whether we look onward into that life whereof many a whisper and a pledge is borne in upon us as the days and the years pass, there is but one fathomless truth, wherein for us all right and beauty, all strength and hope and gain, for ever dwell, and it is this—‘*The greatest . . . is love.*’ To know all that this means would be to compass life’s last meaning and to reach its last arbitrament. Surely no words come nearer to us, pass farther beyond us, than these words. Love is the simplest response of life. Deeper than the theologies and the philosophies it has its being. We met it in those earliest days when all the approval or disapproval we could understand was the gladness or pain in the eyes of those that loved us. It is the simple fact whence home and friend and brother draw all their meaning.

It makes freedom one with service, and joy one with sacrifice. It is the keyword of all religion. There is nothing in all the Christian creed that cannot be interpreted by means of it and in terms of it. There is nothing that has any clear meaning or real worth apart from it. And no man has read aright the Father's word to the world in the Cross of Christ His Son until the message of the supreme fact has become this unto him. '*The greatest . . . is love.*'

And whilst these words are so near to us, whilst they express that which is at once woven into the simple fact of our existence and the simple meaning of our creed, they go beyond us, filling the illimitable future. The last notes of the great Hymn to Love die into a silence which is the dwelling-place of all life's unutterable meaning, its unvoiced certitude, its uninterpreted desire. If the value of a man's utterance depends upon the measure of the unutterable that dumbly strives within it, then are these glowing words of St. Paul precious indeed. For this Hymn has no end. The silence that falls does not

round it off, it carries it on. And that is the great test of all the classics of the heart. They do not weave about us a web of words. They do not snare us with fine phrases. They bring us to the place of silence where there awaits us a message no lips have ever been able to utter, and no pen has ever written. They take us to the high hills where the breath of God is all about us. So is it with this Hymn. Many have read it without knowing it is deathless literature, but surely few have read it without feeling that it is immortal truth. And as long as an inspiration is worth more than a definition, as long as the springtide of the Spirit is worth more than a builded creed, as long as human life is weighted and winged with the precious burden of immortality, so long will this Song of Love eternal and the pleading silence that follows it be dear to the heart of the seeker after God.

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